

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



141 374

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



WARSAW

P O L A N D

Cracow



U. S. S. R.

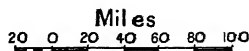
BUDAPEST

H A R Y

R U M A N I A

Danube

BELGRADE



WATCH CZECHOSLOVAKIA !

No one who takes an interest in European affairs to-day (and who could fail to?) can overlook the steadily growing importance of Czechoslovakia, for it is both a storm-centre and a strategic point at which the interests of Russia, Germany, and Italy meet. It is well known that if Czechoslovakia is invaded, France will act as though she herself were invaded; and that since 1936 Hitler has had his plans ready for an invasion. . . .

Mr. Freund, author of *Zero Hour*, knows Central Europe and the Danube basin well, and on a recent visit to Prague he discussed the situation with the President, the Premier, officers of the German party, and other leaders. He has written, not an ephemeral political pamphlet, but an account of the country and its people which is brief, lucid, accurate and of a permanent value.

WATCH CZECHOSLOVAKIA !

by
RICHARD FREUND
Author of "Zero Hour"



THOMAS NELSON & SONS LTD
LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE
TORONTO AND NEW YORK

All rights reserved

THOMAS NELSON & SONS LTD

35-36 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4 ; PARKSIDE
WORKS, EDINBURGH ; 25 RUE DENFERT-ROCHEREAU,
PARIS ; 312 FLINDERS STREET, MELBOURNE ;
91-93 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO ;
381-385 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

First published, October 1937

Reprinted, January, June, July 1938

CONTENTS

I. THE SIGNAL	7
II. THE A B C OF EUROPEAN STRATEGY	11
Behind the Mountain Wall—The German Vision—The Lesson of Brest Litovsk— Danger from Russia.	
III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	20
Early Glory—The House of Habsburg— Towards Liberation.	
IV. THE BIRTH OF A STATE	27
Two Million Deserters—The Provisional Gov- ernment—Facts and Figures.	
V. THE PEOPLE	36
Some Impressions.	
VI. THREE MEN	41
Father of his People—Socrates of Prague— Hodza	
VII. NATIONAL MINORITIES	50
VIII. THE SUDETE GERMAN	53
German Complaints—Economic Grievances —Sins of the Past—The Agreement of February, 1937.	
IX. HENLEIN AND HIS PARTY	67
Origins—The Leader—The Demands—What can be done ?	

X. FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS	77
Three Pillars of Policy—Relations with Soviet Russia—Austria, Hungary, Poland.	
XI. ATTACK AND DEFENCE	95
War or "Intervention"—Military Plans—Is Peace Indivisible ?	
XII. OUTLOOK	108
XIII. SHOW-DOWN	113

WATCH CZECHOSLOVAKIA!

I

THE SIGNAL

TOWARDS the end of 1936 it was reported that a German attack on Czechoslovakia was imminent. The scheme was fully described in the Press of many countries : first, a rising of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, spreading to the German community in Bohemia ; next, "volunteers" would cross the frontier from Germany ; and in the ensuing disorders, Germany would find a pretext for open intervention.

The method had been tested in Spain. Italy and Germany had supported, if not engineered, the rising of General Franco against the Madrid Government, and, without admitting their share in the affair, they had come near to placing into power a government sympathetic to their own ambitions. Madrid was expected to fall at any moment. The success of the new method of international warfare seemed established. "The lesson of Spain," said a writer in *The Round Table*, "is that nowadays wars and threats of wars in Europe may not happen in anything like the 1914 manner, with ultimata, mobilizations, open violations of frontiers. Rather, there may be a mutiny, a riotous election, a sectional uprising—either spontaneous or engineered—and before the general public have had

time to gather their wits, foreign troops and munitions are everywhere. The outcome is a desperate gamble, with world war and the future of civilization as stakes on the table."

The report that some such adventure was pending in Czechoslovakia was rather more than a "Press story." There was sufficient evidence of its seriousness to cause consultations of the General Staffs in several countries. It was strongly rumoured that negotiations for common action had taken place between Germany and Hungary. Concentration of German troops had been observed on the Czechoslovak frontier, where new air ports, roads, and fortifications had been constructed during the summer. The German press was conducting a violent campaign of defamation against Czechoslovakia, giving the impression that it wished to prepare the German public for warlike action.

Hurried inquiries in the threatened districts of Czechoslovakia proved, however, that preparations for a rising were not far advanced, and measures were taken to strengthen the government's control. At the same time, other European powers stepped in. The Soviet Government found means to convince the Germans that any attack on Czechoslovakia, however disguised, would bring into operation the Czech-Soviet pact of mutual assistance. Rumania, whose territory the Russian forces would have to cross on their way to Czechoslovakia, let it be known that she would raise no obstacles. The French Government affirmed the unswerving loyalty of France to her alliance with Czechoslovakia. In Great Britain Mr. Eden pointedly declared that the British Government, though primarily interested in the security of Western Europe, would not remain indifferent to

disturbances of the peace in any other part of the Continent.

And while these momentous events were being considered by those in whose hands the decision lay, the tide unexpectedly turned in the Spanish Civil War. Madrid, reinforced by arrivals of men and material from countries sympathetic to its Socialist Government, held out against the insurgent attack. General Franco's sweeping advance deadened into the familiar stalemate of trench-warfare. The new method of clandestine intervention was suddenly shown to be less efficient than had been thought.

By Christmas the immediate threat to Czechoslovakia had passed, and Dr. Benesh, the President of the Republic, could tell his people in a Christmas message : "I believe that we shall avoid war."

From circumstantial evidence it seems doubtful whether the German plan of 1936 was a definite, timed, and agreed scheme of military aggression. More probably it was merely a proposal urged by the more ambitious Nazi chiefs upon Herr Hitler and the Army leaders. But if that were so, it would not necessarily mean that the fears of Czechoslovakia were groundless. In the first place, wars have often been caused by some haphazard, ill-considered adventure which appeared to guarantee quick success. Secondly, the fact that the advice of the aggressive Nazi section did not prevail is no proof that it was turned down from any desire for peace. Had the international reactions been less unfavourable to Germany, the attack on Czechoslovakia might well have materialized.

A third consideration, and the most important, is this : Whatever may be the immediate intentions of the rulers of Germany, control of Czechoslovakia must be one of their principal ambitions. There is no need to quote

Hitler's own book, *Mein Kampf*, or to debate the seriousness or otherwise of the more grandiose statements of other Nazi leaders. So long as Germany remains in the grip of nationalist ambitions she will, and she must, look upon the south-east of Europe as her natural field of deployment. "The German pressure towards the East," says the German geographer Hassinger in his ten-year-old book, *Die Tschechoslovakei*, "is only a natural expansion in the direction of the least resistance, of the downward incline of culture (*Kulturgefälle*) into a region sparsely populated and in need of development." And the control of Czechoslovakia, that mountain salient which Bismarck once called "A fortress built by God in the very heart of Europe," is vital to any German expansion down the Danube.

Meanwhile the alarm of 1936 served to show that a clash in Central Europe would be more than likely to lead to a general European war.

II

THE A B C OF EUROPEAN STRATEGY

Behind the Mountain Wall

“**W**HOEVER is master of Bohemia is master of Europe,” said Bismarck.

The Republic of Czechoslovakia, founded at the end of the world war from the wreckage of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is the heir and successor of the ancient Kingdom of Bohemia. For 300 years—since the defeat of the Bohemian armies at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620—the Czechs of Bohemia had lived under the domination of the Habsburg Emperors at Vienna. The Slovaks, a closely related people, had for over a thousand years been ruled by the Magyars of Hungary. After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, the three traditional lands of the Bohemian Crown—Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia—were united with Slovakia and the mountainous annex of what is now called Carpathian Ruthenia to form the new State.

Czechoslovakia covers an area of 54,000 square miles (approximately the size of England). It stretches as a narrow strip of land, a kite with a tapering tail, for 584 miles from Bohemia in the west to Ruthenia in the east. At the widest point the kite measures some 170 miles across, while its tail thins out to a mere 30 miles' breadth.

Bohemia, a triangle pointing westward, and enclosing the capital city of Prague, is bounded on three sides by German territory. The other neighbours of Czechoslovakia are Austria, Hungary, and Rumania in the south; Poland in the north.

A great sweep of heavily wooded hills, rising often to 5,000 feet and more, frames Bohemia towards the west. Along the northern frontier the hills extend into Moravia, and continue, after a gap of some 50 miles' width, in the higher ranges of the Tatra and the Carpathians. Along most of the southern frontier there is no such protecting wall, though the Danube forms a natural border for some distance, and lesser hills afford shelter farther east.

Four points should be remembered: (1) the Western mountain arch, pointing towards the heart of Germany; (2) the 50 miles' gap in the northern range which, as the "Gateway of Moravia," has played an important part in the migrations of the European races for thousands of years; (3) the long sweep of the Carpathians pointing towards Rumania and Russia; (4) the Danube in the south.

The Bohemian basin within its mountain walls has been coveted by ambitious nations from the dawn of history, because its possession gives to a strong military power a strategic basis for operations over vast tracts of the European Continent.

The German Vision

Look at the map of post-war Europe. East of Germany there are no longer three powerful empires but a number of small states. By the disruption of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany has been deprived of a territorial

base for operations in South-east Europe. The Danubian route through Austria and Hungary has become a precarious corridor. From the south, Italy resists the German domination of Austria, because the Austrian buffer-state protects the Italian northern frontier against the powerful German Reich. From the north, Czechoslovakia commands the flank of the Danubian route.

There is a tendency to ascribe the German "urge towards the east" to the ambition of Germany's present rulers. That is only half the truth. Undoubtedly, the writings and speeches of Herr Hitler and some of his friends, like Dr. Alfred Rosenberg, reveal a strong desire to concentrate on the domination of eastern and south-eastern Europe. Hitler, in his book, *Mein Kampf*, severely criticizes the policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II., with its yearnings for sea power and colonies. "Germany should have pursued a sound territorial policy of acquiring further lands in Europe itself." As a first step, the Reich should incorporate Austria and as many as possible of the 15,000,000 people of German race who live in non-German states. "Common blood should belong to a common Reich." The south-east of Europe should fall under permanent German influence. To achieve this the friendship of Italy will have to be sought. After that, says Hitler, the ancient German tendency of eastern colonization should be revived.

"We start anew where we left off six centuries ago. We reverse the eternal migration of the German people to the south and west of Europe and look eastward. In this way we bring to an end the colonial and trade policies of pre-war times and pass on to the territorial policy of the future."

Whether or not such plans form part of the immediate

programme of the German Government, they belong to the ancient vision of the German people. They were not invented by the Nazis. Frederick the Great in the eighteenth century, and Bismarck in the nineteenth, acted on them with far greater success than Hitler has done so far. The Habsburgs of Austria formed their vast Empire on these principles. The war aims of Imperial Germany in 1917 were formulated, and brought near to realization, upon the same lines. We may, in fact, regard it as one of the fundamental facts of European politics that Germany, whenever she is strong, will look for expansion in two directions : one towards the sea, opening the maritime gate to the wide world, which is barred and bolted as long as England guards the porch ; the other towards the rich plains of Eastern Europe. It is only the latter route which, in the present division of European power, can be taken at all. And once again the German eastward tide is held back by the Bohemian mountain rampart.

In order to understand the background of the topical writings of the German Nazi chiefs, it is useful to turn back to the year 1917 and consider the German-Russian Peace Treaty of Brest Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1917.

The Lesson of Brest Litovsk

By this Peace Treaty Russia was deprived of 300,000 square miles of territory, with 56,000,000 inhabitants, or a third of her entire population. In the north, she lost Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. In the south, she lost the Ukraine. At the same time, Germany supported the Separatist Movement of General Krasnov, which spread from Ukrainian territory to the regions of

the Don, Kuban, and Terek. Under German auspices a federation of Caucasian States was formed. Thus Russia was completely cut off from the Black Sea, and almost completely from the Baltic Sea.

The importance attached by Germany to these eastern conquests may be gauged from the fact that, up to the end of the war, she kept a million soldiers there, although even half that number, if transferred from the Ukraine and the Baltic States, would have made a great difference, and might have made all the difference, between success and failure in the final German offensive on the Western Front in 1918. Some military experts hold, in fact, that the final collapse of the German armies in the west was largely due to the Imperialist schemes pursued in the east.

Had Germany been able to keep what she obtained by the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, Western Russia, almost surrounded by minor States organized by Germany, would have had to face a constant German threat. Germany would also have been in an excellent position for a further advance into Asia. Dominating Austria and Turkey, she was already firmly established on the Mediterranean, at Trieste and Constantinople. Operating around both sides of the Black Sea, and pressing upon Persia from the north, she was in sight of that glittering prize : access to the Indian Ocean. In 1918 her agents were busy fomenting anti-British movements in Persia, Afghanistan, and in India itself. Given a decade of peaceful penetration on these lines, Germany might have been in a position to strike at the very heart of the British Empire.

The German conquests were lost by the defeat of the German armies ; but to-day the advance has begun once

more. Under present circumstances any defence against the German pressure towards the east must be based on the crests of the Sudete and Carpathian mountain ranges. If Czechoslovakia should be subdued, either by military



action or by diplomatic isolation, the Danubian Basin would at once lie open to the German grasp. Austria and Hungary could no longer resist German domination. Italy could no longer prevent Austria from falling into German hands. Poland would be outflanked.

Once entrenched on the Middle Danube, Germany
(4,518)

would have a strong base for offensive operations. She could advance southwards against Italy, northwards against Poland, and eastwards against the Balkans and Southern Russia. Less than 100 miles separate the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia from the Soviet border. The dividing gap is covered by Polish and Rumanian territory, either of which has to be crossed before Russia can be reached. But with Czechoslovakia under German sway, Poland and Rumania would have to fall in with German desires.

Rumania plays an important part in these schemes. She possesses, 150 miles south-east of the Czechoslovak frontier, the richest oil-fields in Europe. Oil is to the mechanical armies of modern time what grass was to the mounted armies of former centuries. Just as the eastern invaders who overran Europe in succeeding waves always aimed at the fertile Hungarian plain as the best base of operations for advances farther west, so a German eastward advance must ultimately base itself on the Rumanian oil-fields. Control of these priceless sources should not be difficult to obtain after Czechoslovakia had fallen. And based on a secure supply of natural oil, the German armies would be in a good position for regaining the eastern territories which they held—and lost—in 1918.

Danger from Russia

There is, however, another side to the picture. If it is true that any defence against a German eastward advance must be based on the mountain frontiers of Czechoslovakia, it is equally true that these ranges would afford an excellent starting-point for the westward advance of any strong eastern nation.

Czechoslovakia drives a wedge into the centre of Germany. Even if the Germans had never thought of advancing beyond their present frontier, Czechoslovakia would be a thorn in their flesh. From the crest of the Bohemian hills an army could descend, almost unhampered by natural obstacles, into the important industrial provinces of Saxony and Silesia, which are to Germany what Lancashire and Wales are to Great Britain. In fact, Bohemian armies *have* descended into Germany more than once in the past. In the fifteenth century, for instance, they occupied not only the whole of Silesia and parts of Saxony, but a large section of northern Germany, including Berlin; and down to the nineteenth century the nominal authority of Bohemia extended to within 20 miles of the present outskirts of Berlin and Potsdam.

From the present frontier of Czechoslovakia it is 25 miles, as the plane flies, to Dresden; 22 miles to Chemnitz; 60 miles to Leipzig; 11 miles to Goerlitz; 45 miles to Breslau; 108 miles to Berlin; 62 miles to Nuremberg; and 100 miles to Munich.

Obviously it is vital to Germany's security that a country occupying such a commanding geographical position should not be controlled by, or allied to, a great power. On similar grounds, England has never allowed the Low Countries across the Straits of Dover to fall into the hands of any great power; and this principle forms to-day, as it has done since the fall of Spain, the basis of British foreign policy. Nor is the German objection as insincere as it may sound. At the moment, Germany is strong and aggressive. But policies change, while strategic facts remain. It is only fourteen years since France marched into the Ruhr to enforce the full payment of war reparations; and at that period it was seriously

considered whether Czechoslovakia should not join in the enterprise by occupying Germany's eastern industrial areas. Again, the political face of Russia has changed so frequently in the past twenty years that another change towards aggressive Imperialism cannot be altogether ruled out.

A sensible German would probably admit that, at the present time, the alliances of Czechoslovakia with France and Russia are purely defensive. He would, if he were particularly sensible, admit further that the Soviet leaders are terrified of an assault on their country, and that they have joined France and Czechoslovakia, as well as the League of Nations, only for protection against such an assault. He might even admit that Czechoslovakia, that most typical of all bourgeois middle-class countries, is most unlikely to permit her defensive arrangement with Soviet Russia to be transformed into an offensive one.

Yet, looking at the map, the German would still reply with the answer of the man who ran away from a barking dog and was told: "Don't you know that barking dogs don't bite?" "Yes," he said, "*I know, and you know, but how do I know that *he* knows?*"

The Russians speak of Czechoslovakia as a corridor for German armies marching against Russia. The Germans speak of Czechoslovakia as a corridor for Russian troops marching against Germany. Politically, there is more truth in the Russian than in the German argument. Strategically, both are equally true. Stripped of its fancies and exaggerations, the German case against the Czechoslovak link-up with France and Soviet Russia rests on a foundation of genuine anxiety.

III

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early Glory

THE Slav tribes who were the forefathers of the present Czechoslovak nation settled in its present country in the second, third, and fifth centuries A.D., and founded their first State in the seventh century. At the end of the ninth century the "Moravian Empire" included Bohemia, Western Slovakia, and parts of what is now Austria, and extended far to the north. Then came the invasion of the Magyars. The centre of the Slav State passed to Prague, and Bohemia, under its own princes, became an outpost of Christianity and Western civilization in Eastern Europe. It was for this cause that the Bohemian Prince Václav—the Good King Wenceslaus of the Christmas carol—died a martyr's death in 929.

But the period of independence soon ended, and, by the middle of the eleventh century, Bohemia was forced to join the Holy Roman (German) Empire. Its importance to the German Emperors was such that Vratislav II. received a royal crown as the first King of Bohemia, a distinction which was confirmed in 1212 by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa's Golden Bull. The Bohemian kings were included among the seven Imperial Electors and wielded great influence in the affairs of the German

Reich. For a time they ruled Austria down to the Adriatic Sea, though this was taken from them in 1278 by Rudolf, the first Habsburg to become King of Germany. Soon afterwards Bohemian armies conquered the greater part of Poland, and in 1290 the Bohemian King Václav II. became King of Poland.

The close connection of the flourishing Bohemian Kingdom with the German Empire led to an influx of German settlers, traders, monks, and courtiers. From the middle of the twelfth century, large numbers of German peasants came over the mountains and settled in the valleys on the Bohemian side. They cleared the dense forests, cultivated the virgin soil, and built villages which, to this day, have retained their truly German character. At the same time, German merchants were responsible for the foundation of many of the Bohemian and Moravian towns. The court of Prague assumed German manners and dress, and many of the noble families translated their names into German.

A reaction against the growing German influence set in during the fourteenth century, when the Crown of Bohemia passed to the French-reared German Emperor, John of Luxembourg. The House of Luxembourg, which ruled Bohemia for over 100 years, brought into the country a stream of French culture. Literature, architecture, music, and the arts now flourished under French inspiration. This period of splendour reached its peak when King Charles IV., the son of John of Luxembourg, became German Emperor in 1346. Prague now became the centre of the Holy Roman Empire. The Bohemian Crown extended its possessions far into the north and west of Germany. The university of Prague, the first in Central Europe, was founded in 1348.

Under Charles IV. the Church rapidly extended its power, privileges, and wealth, until it owned about one half of the entire land of Bohemia. The seed was thus sown for the long and bitter struggle of the Czechs against the Church of Rome, which combined religious, economic, and national motives.

In 1403 travellers from England brought to Prague the writings of the English theologian John Wycliffe, which were promptly declared heretical by the Church authorities. The Czech masters at the Prague University came out strongly in defence of Wycliffe's views and challenged the verdict of the Church. Among these rebels was John Huss, who had won fame by reforming the Czech orthography and by demanding the preaching of the Gospel in the Czech language.

John Huss was tried and burnt at the stake on the bank of the Rhine near Constance. But his cause became the rallying-point of Czech national sentiment. The common people had already been with him ; the gentry and nobility now acclaimed his views. There followed a general rising against the Roman Church, the first spark of the reforming movement which swept through Christianity in the succeeding century. On July 30, 1419, a procession of Hussites stormed the Prague Town Hall and flung the Councillors from the windows. A few days later the King died, and for seventeen years the Hussites, organized in powerful armies under their famous blind chief, Jan Zizka, carried on a series of wars against various Pretenders to the Bohemian Crown. In the Hussite movement the Czechs for the first time acquired a definite national consciousness. Bohemia and Moravia were forcibly cleared of German influence. Germans were expelled or deprived of privileges ; Prague University,

the stronghold of Bohemian culture, became entirely Czech.

In 1436 a peace was concluded, the Roman Church conceding most of the Czech religious demands. Throughout the fifteenth century Bohemia continued to flourish under its own kings. The Hussite wars and the expulsion of the Germans had, however, left the country underpopulated, and soon a fresh stream of German settlers came in over the mountains and once more took possession of the frontier regions.

In 1526 the Bohemian Crown fell to the House of Habsburg, which had long been working to this end by dynastic marriages and family treaties. Ferdinand I. of Habsburg, King of Austria, became King of Bohemia, and shortly afterwards was elected King of Hungary as well. Bohemia was to remain under Habsburg rule for nearly four centuries.

The House of Habsburg

For a hundred years Bohemia thrived under her new masters. She was the largest and strongest of the Habsburg dominions. As Kings of Bohemia, the Austrian Habsburgs were Electors of the Holy Roman Empire, and this office helped them to obtain the Imperial Crown. Ferdinand I. himself was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1558, on the death of his brother, Charles V. of Spain. The leading position of Bohemia found outward expression when the Emperor Rudolf II., in 1583, chose Prague as the permanent seat of the Imperial Court and the centre of the Imperial Offices of State.

Gradually, however, the reign of the Habsburgs became oppressive. To the traditional privileges of the

Bohemian "Estates" they opposed a claim to absolute rule. The deep-seated tradition of religious freedom, laid by Huss and strengthened by Luther's teachings, was ruthlessly attacked. The revival of Czech national consciousness was suppressed. At length the Czechs, encouraged by advice from England, rose in rebellion.

On May 23, 1618, a revolt broke out in Prague, and the two Habsburg Governors were flung from the windows of the Royal Castle. The Czech aristocracy set up a revolutionary Government and organized the army. The war against the Habsburgs lasted until the Bohemians were defeated at the Battle of the White Mountain on November 8, 1620.

The Habsburgs restored order with a vengeance. Many Czech nobles, burghers, and landowners were executed. Nearly three-fourths of the total area of Bohemia and large tracts of Silesia and Moravia were confiscated for the benefit of the Habsburgs, to be redistributed among officers, nobles and priests who had served their cause. There followed a compulsory re-conversion of Protestants to the Roman faith. Most of them submitted, but some 30,000 families emigrated to Germany, Holland, and England, where the sect of the Bohemian Brethren—or Moravian Church—exists to this day.

After the Battle of the White Mountain Bohemia experienced a sad decline. From being the leading State in Central Europe, she became an exploited Habsburg province. The centre of the Holy Roman Empire and of the Habsburg domains shifted to Vienna. The Bohemian townspeople and peasantry were impoverished by a constant drain of funds for the wars of the Habsburgs. The Bohemian nobility and gentry, deprived of land and

rank, emigrated or sought shelter by submission. Most of the external possessions of the Bohemian Crown were alienated.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a process of Germanization took place. It was quickened by the Thirty Years War, when many Czechs, sympathizing with the Protestant cause, fled the country, leaving the (Papist) Germans in possession. Although the rural population, as well as the lower urban classes, remained Czech in language and outlook, the Germanization of the towns gradually silenced Czech learning and culture, which found refuge in folk music, folk-lore, and rural arts.

Towards Liberation

In 1804 Francis II., as ruler of Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia, assumed the title of Austrian Emperor. Two years later the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" lapsed. Habsburg absolutism now went to such lengths that under the Emperor Francis Joseph, who reigned from 1848 to 1916, Austria became a byword of oppression. The nineteenth century saw the disappearance of all that was left of Bohemian independence. But it was also a century of great economic development and, in its second half, of a fresh Czech national revival. A large industry grew up in the mountainous frontier regions—where poor soil made for cheap labour, where water-power and wood were plentiful, and where coal and mineral ores were found in great quantities. At first the new industry was almost entirely in German hands. Gradually, however, industrial activity spread to the plains, and a Czech industry began to grow up. Commercial rivalry was thus added to racial rivalry and

IV

THE BIRTH OF A STATE

Two Million Deserters

AT the outbreak of the war the latent hostility of the Czechs towards the Habsburg Empire came to a head. The Czech masses were loth to fight against Serbia and Russia. Their leaders realized that an Austro-German victory would be the death of Czech aspirations. It would mean a closer union with the German Reich and victory for the Prusso-German scheme of subjugating Eastern Europe down to the Dardenelles. While the Czechs might have had a slight hope of attaining Home Rule under the Habsburg Empire as it existed before 1914, they could have no such hope under a reorganized Austro-German bloc dominated by Prussia. They could not, therefore, either from sentiment or reason, desire the victory of the central powers.

Not only the Czech, but the Slovak, Serb, Croat, Slovene, Polish, Ruthenian, Rumanian, and Italian subjects of the Habsburgs were unwilling to fight. Entire units of these troops deserted to the enemy or allowed themselves to be taken prisoners. It is estimated that this wholesale mutiny deprived the Austrian Army in the field of some 3,000,000 soldiers, 2,000,000 of whom went voluntarily into captivity. The result was that Austria

provided a strong stimulus for the Czech national movement.

The revolt against Germanization at first showed itself only in such symptoms as the publication of a Czech dictionary and the growing use of the Czech language in poetic and scientific works. But in 1848, when revolution swept all Europe, the Czechs took advantage of Austria's temporary weakness to demand the restoration of Bohemian Home Rule. They were promised reforms, but the promise was not kept. In 1879 Czech delegates entered the Imperial Parliament at Vienna. In 1882 the Czech University at Prague was re-established. In 1889 the Young Czech Party swept the poll at the elections for the Bohemian Diet.

The Czechs had by that time gained considerable economic power. They had their own Press ; their own gymnastic associations ; their own national theatre and academy of science. Czech schools increased in number and quality. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, a revival took place in Czech literature and music. The new university inspired keen interest in science and scholarship. It was a period of mental preparation for political independence.

IV

THE BIRTH OF A STATE

Two Million Deserters

AT the outbreak of the war the latent hostility of the Czechs towards the Habsburg Empire came to a head. The Czech masses were loth to fight against Serbia and Russia. Their leaders realized that an Austro-German victory would be the death of Czech aspirations. It would mean a closer union with the German Reich and victory for the Prusso-German scheme of subjugating Eastern Europe down to the Dardenelles. While the Czechs might have had a slight hope of attaining Home Rule under the Habsburg Empire as it existed before 1914, they could have no such hope under a reorganized Austro-German bloc dominated by Prussia. They could not, therefore, either from sentiment or reason, desire the victory of the central powers.

Not only the Czech, but the Slovak, Serb, Croat, Slovene, Polish, Ruthenian, Rumanian, and Italian subjects of the Habsburgs were unwilling to fight. Entire units of these troops deserted to the enemy or allowed themselves to be taken prisoners. It is estimated that this wholesale mutiny deprived the Austrian Army in the field of some 3,000,000 soldiers, 2,000,000 of whom went voluntarily into captivity. The result was that Austria

was left with only 80 divisions of effective troops instead of the 120 divisions on which the Germans had counted.

The importance of this mass defection for the ultimate issue of the war can hardly be overrated. It can safely be assumed that, had the Slavonic and Latin races of the Habsburg Empire remained loyal, the Russian armies would not have penetrated so deeply into Austrian territory in 1914. Serbia would then have been defeated in the same year. Bulgaria would have joined the central powers in 1914 instead of 1915, and Russia's collapse would have occurred in 1916 instead of 1917. In that case, both Italy (in 1915) and Rumania (in 1916) might well have remained neutral instead of joining the allied side.

Had these events taken place, the situation on the Western Front would have been far more favourable to Germany. In 1917, after the collapse of Russia, the Allies had only some 275 divisions in the field, against the 370 divisions of the Central Powers. If Austria had been able to dispose of 120 instead of 80 divisions, the Central Powers would have outnumbered the Allies to such an extent that America might have thought twice about joining the war.

It may be wrong to ascribe the failure of the Central Powers mainly to the defection of the subject *races* of Austria, but there can be no doubt that this movement played an important part in weakening the Austro-German forces. Moreover, the deserters not merely surrendered as prisoners, but formed fighting units on the allied side. No less than 16 divisions of Habsburg subjects, of whom six were Czechoslovak, fought in the allied armies until the end of the war.

The first of these units was organized in Russia, and distinguished itself during the last Russian offensive in

the summer of 1917. According to General Ludendorf, "the Bolshevik troops offered very little resistance, but the Czechoslovak troops—composed of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war—fought much better, and fierce engagements with them took place." In Italy and France Czechoslovak legions were formed in 1917 and 1918.

Meanwhile the political leaders of the Czechs and Slovaks began a diplomatic campaign for national independence. At first the demand was for a reorganization of the Habsburg Empire in the form of a Federation ; under this new régime, the historical lands of the Bohemian Crown were to be united with Slovakia in an autonomous federal state equal with Austria and Hungary. The reply from Vienna was imprisonment for those Czech and Slovak leaders who had remained at home, several of them being sentenced to death for high treason. Soon the Czechs were claiming the right to set up a fully sovereign State.

Outstanding among the Czech leaders who had gone abroad were Professor Thomas Masaryk, a distinguished historian ; Dr. Edouard Benesh, a young university lecturer ; and Milan Stefanik, a Slovak astronomer who had been living in France. As early as 1915 these men, supported by Czech and Slovak colonies in allied countries, set up a "Committee of Action" which in 1916 was converted into a "National Council of the Bohemian Lands," with headquarters in Paris.

In London Masaryk attracted attention by a lecture at King's College on the problem of the small nations of Europe. Soon afterwards Mr. (now Sir) Samuel Hoare introduced him to several Cabinet Ministers, and his persuasive eloquence gradually made an impression. In Paris, he was able to win the sympathy of M. Briand, the Prime

Minister. In May 1917 he set off for Russia, equipped with a British passport issued in the name of Thomas Marsden. The first revolution had broken out, and some of the members of the Kerensky Government were Masaryk's friends. He lectured to public meetings, wrote articles for the newspapers, and canvassed officials and politicians on the project of an independent Czechoslovak State. At the same time, he demanded the reorganization of the Czechoslovak legions as a separate army corps. In this he succeeded a few days before the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution.

After that, Masaryk was anxious to remove the legions to the Western Front. The only route open to them was across 5,000 miles of Asiatic Russia to the Pacific Ocean. That route they took, marching in perfect order and discipline, under constant attacks, undeterred by the difficulties of distance and supply. In the words of Mr. Lloyd George, "the story of the adventures and triumphs of this small army is indeed one of the greatest epics of history." And Mr. Churchill (in *The World Crisis*) writes: "The pages of history recall scarcely any parallel episode at once so romantic in character and so extensive in scale."

The Provisional Government

Masaryk himself, on his 68th birthday, took the trans-Siberian railway to Vladivostock, arrived at Tokyo on April 8, 1918, and soon began a whirlwind campaign of political meetings in the United States. He submitted a memorandum to President Wilson and had the satisfaction of securing full acceptance for his claims. Meanwhile Dr. Benesh and his friends had been busy in Europe. On August 9, 1918, the British Government issued a

declaration recognizing the Czechoslovaks as an allied nation and confirming the right of their National Council to speak for "the future Czechoslovak Government." Similar statements were issued by French, American, Italian, and Japanese Governments. On October 14, 1918, the National Council converted itself into a provisional Czechoslovak Government, which was recognized by the allied powers in the same month. Masaryk, Benesh, and Stefanik were appointed to the leading posts.

At the end of October the Austrian Government accepted President Wilson's peace terms. The Czechs regarded this acceptance as recognition of their independence, and on October 28th a bloodless revolution took place in Prague. The Austrian administration was removed without resistance, and Czechoslovak politicians and officials took over the machinery of government. On November 14 a National Assembly met in Prague and proclaimed Czechoslovakia a free democratic Republic. Masaryk was unanimously elected President and the members of the provisional government in Paris were confirmed in their offices.

Masaryk was still in America when these events occurred; he did not return to his country until the end of December. Dr. Benesh remained in Paris for the Peace Conference, and Stefanik, who had gone to Italy to look after the Czechoslovak legions there, was killed in an aeroplane crash at the moment of crossing the Slovak frontier for the first time since his exile. Yet the transfer from Austrian rule to independence was achieved without violence or disorder.

In the Peace Treaties Czechoslovakia figured as one of the allied and associated powers, and, after considerable difficulties, obtained a very favourable delimitation of her

frontiers. The historical dominions of the Bohemian Crown, as far as they had still been with Austria-Hungary, were restored ; Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia were taken from Hungary and joined to the new State. Two districts of Lower Austria and one small area of Germany were added for reasons of communications. There followed an attempt by the German people of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia to form autonomous areas and to join the new Austrian Republic. It was quickly subdued. Poland then claimed the district of Teshen, an important mining centre which the Czechs had included in their State. After some hostilities the parties submitted to arbitration, which was finally completed in 1920, the district being divided between the two claimants. Yet another difficulty arose in May 1919, when a Communist régime was set up in Hungary and its Red Army invaded Slovakia. Again Czechoslovak authority was soon restored.

The new Republic found its feet very quickly. It was one of the few Continental countries to remain free from communist revolts and labour unrest. Alone in Central Europe it was spared the destruction of its currency through inflation. Although there was a desperate shortage of suitable men for the higher appointments in the Civil Service, the Army, and the diplomatic missions, the new government machinery was working tolerably well within a year or two of its start.

Facts and Figures

The economic life of the country is well balanced as between agriculture and industry. Forty per cent. of the population are engaged in agriculture and forestry, 34 per

cent. in industry and trades. Agriculture predominates in the east, industry in the west.

Czechoslovakia inherited about 60 per cent. of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the following proportions of its industrial output : sugar, 90 per cent. ; metallurgical products, 60 per cent. ; china, nearly 100 per cent. ; glass, 92 per cent. ; textiles, 75 per cent. ; leather, 70 per cent. ; paper, 65 per cent.

Chief among the natural resources are coal and lignite. The country produces more than its needs of both. The bulk of the iron ore needed is found in the country ; additional imports come from Sweden, Hungary, and Spain. Among further primary resources, timber, graphite, and magnesium are noteworthy.

The principal industries are coal-mining, iron and steel, engineering, sugar, distilling, brewery, textile, glass, china, cellulose and paper, leather, boot and shoe, glove, chemical, and jewellery industries.

A very high proportion of the nation's trade is done with foreign countries. Many of its industries work largely or wholly for export, while a great variety of goods are imported for re-export, either with or without undergoing refining processes. Czechoslovakia acts as middleman and financier for much of the trade between the Western industrial nations and the smaller countries of the Near East.

The principal Czechoslovak exports, in the order of importance, are the following (1936) : iron, steel, and manufactures thereof ; cotton, yarn and tissues ; glass and glassware ; wool, yarn and tissues ; leather and leather goods ; coal and lignite ; timber ; apparel ; silk and silk goods ; cereals ; non-ferrous metals and manufactures thereof ; fruit and vegetables ; machinery

and apparatus ; paper and paper goods ; linen and other textiles ; pottery ; sugar ; animal products ; vehicles.

The principal imports are : cotton ; wool ; fruit and vegetables ; non-ferrous metals ; animal products ; iron and minerals ; silk ; machinery and apparatus ; cattle ; flax, hemp and jute ; mineral oils ; chemical raw materials ; paints, dyes, and pharmaceutical goods ; coal ; electrical machinery.

The principal suppliers of goods to Czechoslovakia, in the order of importance, are : Germany, U.S.A., France, Great Britain, Rumania, Austria, Yugoslavia, Holland, Switzerland, and British India.

The chief customers of Czechoslovakia are : Germany, U.S.A., Great Britain, Austria, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Switzerland, France, and Holland.

The Constitution of the Republic was passed by the National Assembly in 1920 on the lines laid down by Masaryk in his declarations during the war. The sole source of power in the State is the people. Government is carried on by the President, who is elected by a joint session of the two Chambers of Parliament for seven years, and by a Cabinet of Ministers responsible to Parliament. Members of the Chamber of Deputies (300) and of the Senate (150) are elected by universal suffrage on a secret and direct ballot according to the principle of proportional representation. All citizens of 21 years and over are allowed to vote at elections for the Chamber of Deputies ; the age limit for elections to the Senate is 26 years. Voting is obligatory.

Under this Constitution Czechoslovakia has enjoyed remarkable political stability. In eighteen years it has had only four parliamentary elections, and governments have

been based throughout that period on more or less similar coalitions of the chief parties.

The State is strongly centralized. It is true that in 1927 the four main sections of the country—Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia, and Carpathian Ruthenia—were constituted “lands” with their own Diets and some degree of self-government. But in practice there has been little progress towards the decentralization which was envisaged when the Republic was founded. Strong central authority was indeed indispensable for the building up of the new State. Enthusiasm had to be converted into constructive responsibility. Government machinery had to be organized from its foundations. Social legislation of a very progressive kind had to be passed and put into force throughout the country. The problem of the national minorities had to be defined by legislation.

In the short period of its restored life, the Czechoslovak State has grown into a well-ordered political entity enjoying free institutions and domestic peace. Surrounded on almost all sides by dictatorships, it has held fast to its democratic régime and steered a steady middle course between the extremes of political systems. The stresses to which the State is subject, both at home and in its international relations, will be discussed in detail later on. But this may be said here: if the Czechoslovak Republic is *compared* with any of its neighbours, it stands out as a remarkably successful venture in national independence and civil liberty.

V

THE PEOPLE

Some Impressions

THE Czechs are a virtuous people. They are tidy, thrifty, hard-working, and sober. They rise early, eat well and heartily, obey the laws, and read greedily. They love music, though not the wild, unsettling tunes of the gypsies, but orderly, gentle performances. They are gifted craftsmen, steady and enduring; the machinery they turn out is as fine as any in Europe.

As for thriftiness . . . I was told that a certain politician was not popular because he was a spendthrift. "What is the trouble?" I asked. "Women or gambling?" Nothing like that, I was assured. Nothing at all on that scale—but smaller things; tips, for instance. Every Czech, it was explained, gives a tip of exactly 10 per cent., or, if possible, $9\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. That minister, on the other hand, was in the habit of wasting 20 or 30 per cent. of his bill on tips. Naturally, people did not like that!

Compare the Czechs with their Hungarian neighbours, and you get their measure. The Hungarian is fierce, passionate, recklessly hospitable, wildly romantic. He feels bored with steady progress, feeling in his element only when things begin to rush. As for money, the

Magyars once sacked a Prime Minister, Károlyi, because he was a miser. Hungarian women are among the most beautiful, most fascinating, and best-dressed in the world.

None of these things could be said of the Czechs. They are typical bourgeois, caring for home and family, job and insurance policy. Extremes, both in politics and private life, are utterly alien to them. They like orderly progress and, one suspects, would much rather be well-to-do than rich.

The prevalent physical type is fair, small, and stocky, with an exceptionally large skull, deep-set eyes, and a broad mouth. The typical Czech woman is neat rather than pretty, sensible rather than romantic. Prague, for all its fashionable shops and charming dance-bars, presents the casual visitor with few glimpses of striking human beauty.

Democracy—now qualified as “disciplined democracy”—is a reality. Though the Czechs quarrel frequently, they seldom fight. Individualism is strongly developed. The nation is neither docile nor servile ; but it is law-abiding and amenable to persuasion and compromise. In Parliament, Conservatives and Socialists have formed a government coalition ever since 1919.

There is good reason for all that. During the three centuries of their subjection, the Czechs had become a people of peasants, workmen, tradesmen, and minor officials. The landed aristocracy was Germanized long ago, and until the last generation the ownership of big industries was chiefly in German hands. The result is that the Czechs have not yet formed an “upper class.” Whatever their present differences in wealth, standing,

and upbringing, they know well enough that their parents, or at least their grandparents, were more or less equal.

The individualism which is encouraged by the absence of strong class differences has its roots also in religious and political traditions. It was in Bohemia that the revolt against the Roman Catholic Church began at the end of the Middle Ages. Although the bulk of the population was later forcibly reconverted, the Protestant spirit never died down completely. Further, the fact that in the later stages of the Habsburg rule the Czechs belonged almost exclusively to the lower classes, gave them a natural leaning towards Liberal and Socialist views. In practice many of them are more or less Conservative ; in spirit, they are still Radicals to a man.

Progressive political ideas and democratic feeling are all the more deeply rooted for having grown out of a struggle against the privileges of an upper class which was not of the same race. Liberalism and Socialism, therefore, are bound up with Czech patriotism and jealously defended as the tangible guarantees of national independence. It is largely for this reason that democratic institutions have remained unshaken in Czechoslovakia at a time when they were being wiped out in all other countries of Central Europe.

Another important feature of the national character is the love for intellectual pursuits. Almost without exception the national heroes of the Czech people are men of the pen rather than the sword. There was John Huss, the university professor and author of a Czech dictionary; Comenius, the scholar ; Palacky, the historian. Most of the political leaders in the nineteenth century were writers and professors. Among the leaders of the present

revival the three outstanding figures are Masaryk, a philosopher; Benesh, a university lecturer; and the late Dr. Stefanik, an astronomer.

The number of books produced in Czechoslovakia is amazing. More foreign books are translated into Czech than into any other language. The reading public for serious books is very large. It is said that whenever a Czech has a minute's leisure, you will find him either eating or reading.

What has been said of the Czechs does not generally apply to the Slovaks. The greater part of Slovakia has been under Hungarian rule for over ten centuries, and that domination was not as effete as the Austrian rule in Bohemia. The Slovaks have remained simple peasants, while the Czechs progressed through intellectual, religious, and industrial movements to national consciousness.

Although the Slovaks, whose language differs only slightly from the Czech, never ceased to feel themselves a Slav people, their political aspirations were never allowed to develop. They had few schools worthy of that name, and if any of them wished to rise from the peasant class, his only way was to become a Hungarian in speech and manner.

The average Slovak shows unmistakable signs of Magyar rule. He is devout, docile, and fatalistic. He is also, when times permit, carefree and extravagant. If the Czech is a realist, the Slovak is a dreamer. To the stubborn seriousness of the Czech he adds a much-needed leaven of gaiety. Need I say that the personage mentioned before as irritating the Czechs by spending too much money is a Slovak?

The two races blend well. Working together, they

are constantly correcting each other's shortcomings. The Slovak is more lovable, the Czech more efficient. Slovak wisdom takes the edge off Czech cleverness. The thoroughness of the Czechs guarantees that the spark of genius which is apparent in many Slovaks does not spend itself in mere fireworks.

The best illustration of the capacities of the Czechoslovak blend is the life of Professor Masaryk, who was born as the son of a Slovak father and a Czech mother in Moravia. Brought up outside the reach of Hungarian rule with its crushing disabilities, he was able to rise to a distinguished academic career. In his work for the foundation of the Czechoslovak State, he combined the large conceptions of the Slovak with the intellectual lucidity and the political cunning of the Czech. No better memorial could have been set to the union of these two kindred races.

NOTE

The following chapter was in print when Thomas Masaryk died, mourned with passionate grief by his people. Though his mellowed counsel is no longer available to the country's younger leaders, it remains true that his teachings and the revered memory of his life are steadying the nerves and minds of the people of Czechoslovakia at a time when the country is faced with appalling dangers.

As for Dr. Benesh, the impression of calm confidence given in the succeeding pages was in no need of revision two months after the collapse of Austria. On the other hand, Dr. Hodza's economic schemes have obviously been frustrated by that event, though opportunities for commercial co-operation with other Danubian and Balkan countries are still available.

VI

THREE MEN

Father of his People

WITHOUT Masaryk Czechoslovakia would not exist. It has been said that he invented it ; and it is certainly true that he was the most outstanding among the men who prepared, founded, and reared the new Republic. To-day, at 87, Masaryk lives in retirement at the castle of Lana, near Prague. His active days are over, but still the people feel that Masaryk is the living guarantee of their independence and liberty.

Tall, gaunt, bearded, and spectacled, he resembles Don Quixote. His manners are simple, his talk is downright. He is deeply religious, with a curious combination of peasant faith and high academic culture. The son of a coachman, a serf, he worked his way up by sheer industry and steadfastness to a prominent place among European philosophers and statesmen. He did not rise as dictators do, by luck, violence, or intrigue. Nor did he ever appeal from the platform to the emotions of the masses. His weapon was the pen, and his best speeches were made in committee rooms. He never sought more power than his democratic position gave him.

Ever since his undergraduate days, Masaryk had been deeply interested in the Czech national movement ; and

when, in 1882, a Czech University was opened in Prague, he was offered and accepted a professorship there. From that time he became active in Czech politics and soon founded his own party—the “Realist” Party. In 1907 he was elected to the Imperial Parliament. He was now one of the acknowledged leaders of Czech opinion, and his name was known beyond Austria. He became a thorn in the side of the government, constantly opposing its foreign policy, which was driving Europe into war. And when the war of 1914 broke out, he realized at once that the chance of the Czech people had come.

It has already been described how he went abroad and persuaded the British, French, and American Governments to include the establishment of a sovereign Czechoslovak State in their declared war aims. Gradually the Czech leaders, both at home and abroad, recognized him as the natural head of the movement, and when, in October 1918, the Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed in Prague, there was never a moment's doubt but that Thomas Masaryk would be its first President.

He was then sixty-eight years of age. For another seventeen years he guided the affairs of his country with unfailing vigour. Mellowed by age and achievement, he retained the tough fibre of one who has fought hard all his life. Knowing the strength and weakness of his people, he did not tire of preaching tolerance and patience. To-day the shades have settled on his life. He can do little more than steady the pulse of the nation by occasional advice. Even so, his presence is strongly felt, and the veneration he enjoys is a powerful uniting element in the life of the people.

Socrates of Prague

Dr. Edouard Benesh, Foreign Minister from 1918 to 1935, and President since, is addicted to logic and reason. Where Masaryk will make a plain statement, Benesh will develop an elaborate argument, suavely leading from premise to deduction, from evidence to verdict. Once he has started a train of thought, there is no holding him until the logical conclusion is reached. A most fascinating performance to watch. Off come the horn-rimmed glasses, drawing in the air the very shape of each succeeding argument. The strongly sculptured head, a little too large for the short, wiry figure, helps, like the beautiful hands, in the labour of persuasion. By the time Dr. Benesh has finished tearing your ideas to shreds and building them up again in a new, strange shape, you feel like one of the blundering disciples of Socrates. Yet when all is finished, he will abandon the point with a kindly smile, and go off at a tangent to repeat the process with a different, and possibly contradictory, argument.

A great talker at the conference table. An outstanding finder of formulas. A master at solving diplomatic deadlocks. Wherever reason rules, people will be caught in the net of his arguments. At Geneva, as in Paris, he is irresistible. Only the Germans, who are mystics, and the English, who are impervious to words, can hold their own against him.

Born as the youngest of eight sons of a Bohemian peasant, Benesh was soon marked as the scholar of the family. He was sent to the grammar school in Prague, where he excelled more at football than at studies. A broken shin ended his sporting career and turned his

mind to books. He entered the university and, according to the fashion of the time, became a Socialist. He walked out of a lecture given by Masaryk as a protest against the religious background of Masaryk's philosophy. At twenty, he went to Paris and studied at the Sorbonne, earning his fees by writing socialist and anti-clerical articles for French and Czech newspapers. His socialist comrades distrusted him because he was lacking in revolutionary fire, admitting only what could be proved by intellectual argument. Imbued with the spirit of Karl Marx, he went to England and was bitterly disappointed to find that people would admit all his contentions without taking the slightest notice of them.

Benesh was twenty-four when he returned to Prague. Under the influence of Masaryk's teaching, he gradually gave up Marxism. Studying philosophy, law, and political science, he was soon appointed Professor at the Commercial Academy. He threw himself heart and soul into the Czech National Movement. When the war broke out, he promptly offered his services to Masaryk, who, in 1915, called him to Geneva. Armed with a forged passport, Benesh walked by night across the German frontier and took train to Switzerland.

Soon Masaryk found the young man indispensable. The task of the Czechoslovak leaders abroad was persuasion; and persuasion was Benesh's strong suit. He became secretary of the Czech National Council, and when this body was converted into a provisional Government of Czechoslovakia, he was the only serious candidate for the post of Foreign Secretary. Benesh represented the new Czechoslovak Republic at the Peace Conference; Benesh proposed and concluded the alliances with France and the Little Entente; Benesh

was Czechoslovakia's spokesman at the League of Nations and at all the countless international conferences of the post-war period. For seventeen years he held the post of Foreign Minister.

No longer can President Benesh join the fray of diplomatic conferences. How he must chafe under the enforced silence of his new dignity ! All his political life was spent in meetings and negotiations. Now he sits solemnly—but no, not very solemnly—in the shimmering castle of the Bohemian kings. You have to pass sentries and frock-coated equerries who open golden doors. Three vast imperial ballrooms, white and gold, marble and silk, have to be crossed before you reach the President's room.

When I did so, a little notion flashed through my head the moment I saw the President rise from his desk. His room is very large, and the natural place for the desk would be the far corner, where the light would come from the back. Actually, it is placed only a few yards from the entrance, in the centre of the room, and gets its light from the right-hand side, a position which every writing man detests. Now the dignity of modern leaders, as defined by Mussolini, demands that the visitor should have to cross the length of the room to reach the great man—feeling thoroughly small and unsettled by the time he arrives. I can imagine Dr. Benesh standing this kind of trickery for a day or two, and after that putting up with inconvenience rather than with fake solemnity.

He has hardly altered. Surrounded by splendour, he enjoys life in his old way : debating, persuading, reasoning. His influence, both in the foreign policy in his country and in European affairs, is still powerful. His faith in the ultimate victory of reason strikes one as pre-

carious in the face of advancing lawlessness ; but what else can he believe in, if not that his allies will honour their pledges and his enemies will hold their hand ?

A curve of the expressive spectacles waives away all pessimism. It is only a transition ; new problems have arisen and it takes some time to work out solutions. There will be no war, because the friends of peace are too strong. Only they must not falter now. And the President jumps up to explain it all with his glasses on the large map. Maps do not lie. Dr. Benesh has become an expert in geography—which means in the science of warfare.

Backed by the immense prestige of Masaryk, and served by a team of capable men, Benesh is firmly steering his country through a period of desperate danger. A little David with a sling of reason, standing up against the raging giant Goliath.

A gallant man.

Hodza

Dr. Milan Hodza, Prime Minister since 1935, is a man of vision. He moves slowly, works quietly, and knows his mind. He is exceedingly ambitious, but experience has taught him self-control. There was a time when Dr. Hodza, a Slovak reared in Hungary, seems to have believed that the highest position in the new State would fall to him almost as a matter of course. He rose quickly ; but his instinct for diplomacy, his geniality, and his social training could not defeat the stern rationalism of the Czech leaders. It was only when he had learned to co-operate with these former rivals that he reached the office which he now holds.

Hodza is the son of a Protestant clergyman. He attended first a Hungarian and later a German grammar

school and studied at Budapest University. At 19 he founded an association of Slovak, Serb, and Rumanian students, and had to leave Budapest. He continued his studies in Vienna, where he took his degree as Doctor of Philosophy. About that time he founded a Slovak newspaper which, before long, attracted attention to his political ability.

Long before the war Hodza had made contact with Masaryk and the Czech National movement; he was one of the first Slovaks to suggest the union of the two kindred peoples in a new State. On the day when war was declared he was arrested and interned in Vienna, but soon he was again in close touch with the Czech spokesmen. In October 1918 he went to Budapest and witnessed the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic by Count Károlyi. The same day he convened a meeting of Slovak leaders which declared the long association of the Slovaks with Hungary ended. With this resolution in his pocket, Hodza went to Prague, where the declaration of independence had already been made. He was sent back to Budapest as the first Envoy of the Czechoslovak Republic.

In 1919 Dr. Hodza received his first appointment as Cabinet Minister, which was followed by many others. He was a particular success as Minister of Agriculture, a post which he held in succeeding Cabinets for many years. Gradually he became the outstanding leader of the Agrarian (Conservative) Party, the largest in Parliament. And after a temporary eclipse he became Prime Minister at the end of 1935, when Dr. Benesh was elected President.

Czechs are apt to declare that Hodza's repeated disagreements with "the Castle" were due entirely to his excessive personal ambition. But that is only half the truth.

I am inclined to believe that Hodza has an important mission to fulfil, which prevents him from acquiescing in the spirit emanating from "the Castle," as represented by Masaryk and Benesh. He comes from another world, follows different conceptions, and believes in different methods. If the Czech leaders are inclined to be rigidly legalistic, Hodza sets higher store by social contact and political compromise. His manner, as narrow-minded Czechs will assert with some resentment, recalls the spacious days of pre-war Hungary, where politics were made by the landed aristocracy, by generals and court officials. Hodza is no stickler for small points; he cares little for the intellectual triumphs of argument and debate; he will gladly abandon the letter of some agreement if a compromise offers better scope.

So long as Czechoslovakia found security in treaties and covenants, the letter of the law was no doubt her best protection. But now that the law of Europe has been shaken, and the threat of force has once again become a vital feature of international relations, a small nation may be well advised to search for new remedies rather than to insist on old treaties. In this situation Dr. Hodza's gift for compromise may yet prove indispensable to Czechoslovakia.

For some years Dr. Hodza has been prominent in the movement for an economic reorganization of the Danube area. The troubles of that region are largely due to the disruption of the large economic unit of the Habsburg monarchy. Each of the small succession states has, for political reasons, erected tariff walls and built up industries. If it were possible to re-establish a Customs Union, or even a central marketing organization for the exportable surplus of the Danubian States, they would all be able

to prosper. Many schemes have been worked out, but all so far have broken down on account of political rivalries.

Dr. Hodza's particular scheme is based on a grain pool for export purposes which would place the Danubian area in a strong position for bargaining with prospective customers. In addition, he proposes a system of preference duties or similar arrangements by which mutual commerce of the small states would be increased. By developing new markets in Western Europe and overseas, he hopes to lessen the dependence on the German and Italian markets, which is giving the two latter countries a lever for exerting political influence in the Danube. Such schemes can, of course, only be promoted piecemeal, and Dr. Hodza has already had some success. A far-reaching commercial treaty was recently concluded with Austria, and the prolonged trade war with Hungary seems to be on the point of being settled. Co-operation with Rumania and Yugoslavia is being encouraged by a special organization and the development of overseas markets has made progress.

In the political field, Dr. Hodza's efforts to bring the Danubian States together for joint resistance to outside exploitation had, until recently, met with failure. But a new spirit is growing up as a result of the menace of German-Italian collaboration. Czechoslovak relations with Austria have become very friendly; even with Hungary there is, for the first time, some hope of neighbourly co-operation. Such efforts are always liable to be wrecked by Germany or Italy, who are anxious to keep the Danubian States divided. But it is something to have in Czechoslovakia a Premier who works actively for a new order in the Danubian tangle, and for reconciliation among old rivals and enemies.

VII

NATIONAL MINORITIES

THE wars and migrations of twenty centuries have left the races of Central Europe without clear-cut territorial frontiers. Every one of the present states contains alien communities whose language, customs, and loyalties belong to another country. As the mother countries take an interest in the fate of their children beyond the frontiers, international relations are strongly affected by minority problems.

Nowhere in Europe are the alien communities larger, or more important for international relations, than in Czechoslovakia. Out of a total population of nearly 15,000,000, five millions, or one-third, are neither Czechs nor Slovaks. Along with 9,688,943 Czechs and Slovaks (66.92 per cent.) live 3,231,000 Germans (22.3 per cent.), 692,000 Magyars (4.78 per cent.), 549,000 Ruthenians (3.79 per cent.), 82,000 Poles (0.56 per cent.), and 186,000 Jews (1.29 per cent.).

Both the abnormal size of the minorities, and the need for dealing gently with them, have made it difficult for Czechoslovakia to build up within the new Republic a united national consciousness. Even the co-operation between Czechs and Slovaks, who together must form the nucleus of the State, has not always been easy. The Czechs were the main carriers of the movement for

national independence ; they had more political experience and a higher standard of education than the Slovaks, who had with difficulty maintained their national identity under Hungarian rule. The Czechs accordingly took the leading part in the building up of the new State, and the Slovaks complained of neglect and discrimination. Although some Slovak leaders have risen to high positions, and one of them, Dr. Hodza, is Prime Minister at the present time, the grievance continues. There is a strong autonomy movement in Slovakia, led by Father Hlinka, a powerful country priest. But though the claim to greater consideration is pressed with some heat, it is in no way separatist. In 1934 Father Hlinka joined with all other Slovak deputies and senators in signing a manifesto repudiating the claim made abroad that a section of the Slovaks desired to return to Hungary.

If it is difficult to unite the Czechs and Slovaks, with their widely different temperament and tradition, it is still harder to satisfy the alien communities. The position of the German minority, which is by far the strongest, will be discussed separately in the next chapters. Second in importance is the Magyar, or Hungarian, minority, which is spread along the Hungarian frontier in Eastern Slovakia and the south-eastern part of Carpathian-Ruthenia. It consists mainly of peasants and small townsmen, most of the landed gentry having withdrawn to Hungary.

Although the bulk of the Hungarian minority retains its loyalty to Hungary, it would be wrong to assume that a large section of it is ready to give trouble to the Czechoslovak authorities. The official Czech policy has been, broadly speaking, to deal harshly with those who oppose the government, while making concessions to those who

accept the new conditions. In 1935 an agreement was made with the Hungarian leaders, as a result of which the bulk of the community voted for Dr. Benesh in the presidential elections. From that time mutual relations, though still far from satisfactory, have greatly improved.

The Ruthenian minority is settled mainly in Carpathian-Ruthenia. The bulk of these people are racially akin to the Ukrainians but speak a different language. They belonged formerly to Hungary, and were the most neglected section among the many races of that country. Czechoslovakia has done much to raise the standard of education and social services among them, but it is slow, uphill work, and even to-day conditions in these mountainous areas, which include some of the wildest and most beautiful scenery in Europe, are still primitive.

The small Polish minority lives mainly in the mining district of Teshen and the surrounding industrial area, which fell to Czechoslovakia after a sharp quarrel in 1920. Since Poland's attitude to Czechoslovakia became unfriendly, the local grievances of the Polish minority have been exploited for all they are worth. Although insignificant as an internal problem, they deserve attention for the part they play in relations with Poland.

VIII

THE SUDETE GERMANS

FOR various reasons the German minority represents not only the outstanding internal problem of Czechoslovakia, but one of her gravest international problems.

In the first place, the German community is the largest national minority in any European state, except for the Ukrainians in Poland.

Secondly, the Germans are in a strong geographical position. Most of them live in eight compact areas along the frontiers of Austria and the German Reich. The largest group, numbering 835,000, lives in Western Bohemia along the Bavarian and Saxon frontiers. The next largest, divided from the first by districts of mixed Czech-German population, numbers 808,000 and lives in Northern Bohemia along the Prussian frontier. Again separated by a Czech corridor follows a German region of 130,000 people bordering on Prussian Silesia. Then follows a broad Czech zone, until another German area is reached: Northern Moravia, with 325,000 Germans. To the south there are two German areas: one in Southern Bohemia with 87,000 Germans, and one in Southern Moravia with 100,000 Germans. The rest of the German districts are small and scattered. Large numbers of Germans live in districts with Czech majorities. Although, broadly speaking, the Germans inhabit compact areas

along the frontiers of Czechoslovakia, they are sufficiently split up by Czech or mixed areas to make territorial autonomy difficult. According to Dr. Hodza, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, "territorial autonomy would mean that 380,000 Czechs would be sacrificed in the German regions, while in the remaining areas 730,000 Germans would be placed at a similar disadvantage."

Thirdly, the Germans of Czechoslovakia have a high standard of economic and cultural maturity. The bulk of the Bohemian industry has always been in the German regions. The Bohemian Germans—or, as they call themselves after one of the mountain ranges which they inhabit, the Sudete Germans—have contributed their full share to German cultural progress. Most important of all, during the 300 years of Habsburg rule the Germans were the privileged race, ruling over the Czechs and holding practically all the higher appointments in the State. Throughout most of that period, German was the official language of the country.

These facts are well remembered by both Czechs and Germans. It is almost inevitable that a community which within living memory held sway over a country now in the hands of its former subjects should be dissatisfied with the position of a tolerated minority, however tolerant their treatment may be. And it should be clearly noted that for this chief grievance of the Sudete Germans there exists no remedy except the disappearance of the Czechoslovak State.

The next point arises from what has just been said. The Sudete Germans have made good use of their geographic and economic position to form political movements which are now being used by Germany as a lever for her policy of removing the Czechoslovak obstacle

from the path of German eastward expansion. So long as the Sudete Germans have reason to complain of unfair treatment, Czechoslovakia presents Germany with an easy excuse for hostile interference.

In the present state of European relationships nothing should be left untried which offers even a faint hope of reconciliation. The claims of the Sudete Germans, therefore, deserve careful and objective study.

German Complaints

The outstanding complaint of the Germans is that they do not enjoy full citizenship on equal terms with Czechs and Slovaks. They assert that the use of the German language is needlessly restricted in the German areas ; and that is a true grievance. Although the Language Act provides that all Courts of Law and public offices must accept and deal with applications in German wherever the German-speaking population numbers more than 20 per cent., this provision has not been generally applied until recently. As the majority of the police, railway, post office, and similar officials in the German regions are Czechs, the Germans are constantly subjected to irritation. There is the occasional Czech postman who cannot read German addresses, especially when written in the Gothic script. There is a Czech booking-office clerk at a certain railway station who delays German-speaking passengers until the train has left. It is easy to waive aside such apparently paltry complaints by pointing to generous laws ; but the fact is that minor Czech officials in the German districts have made full use of their opportunities for petty persecution in disregard of government orders.

The Germans further complain of discrimination against them in the appointments for Government services. Again the complaint is largely justified. But in this matter it would not have been easy for the Czechoslovak Government to yield to the German demand. The Sudete Germans took up a hostile attitude towards the Czechoslovak State from the very beginning. They had strongly objected to their incorporation; they declared that they did not regard the Czechoslovak Constitution, or any legislature passed under it, as binding upon them. In these circumstances the Prague Government can hardly be blamed for declining to give to the Germans their full share of higher appointments in the services, the police, and the important departments of State. As a result, the Germans feel that they are being treated as inferior citizens.

The Agrarian Reform which was carried out in the early years after the war was in practice largely directed against the German landowners. It is quite true that the Germans happened to own more and larger estates than the Czechs; but in the confiscation of farmlands and forests, the Germans were treated more strictly, and compensated less amply, than others. This is freely admitted in Czech circles. Moreover, many German employees of the confiscated estates lost their livelihood; and many Czech "colonists" were introduced into German areas.

There can be no doubt that it was a mistake for the Czechs and Slovaks to continue the struggle against the German language and institutions after the German domination had been thrown off. The very name Czechoslovakia—why, oh why did they not stick to Bohemia?—suggests that the State was based from its foundation on the two Slav races alone. Nothing that

is being done now to remove the German grievances will repair that initial blunder.

There is, however, a great deal to be placed on the credit side of the Czechoslovak Government. By the universal and equal franchise the Sudete Germans gained full proportional representation in both local governments and Parliament. From the beginning they have controlled all parish and municipal councils in which they had a majority. Their right to have their children educated in German schools by German teachers was immediately recognized for all types of schools.

According to the statistics for October 1935, 97 per cent. of the German children were in elementary schools where German was the language of instruction; 93 per cent. of the German children attending upper elementary schools were in German schools with German teachers.

With regard to higher education, the position of the Germans is, if anything, better than that of the Czechs. Of the 290 secondary schools in Czechoslovakia, 80, or 27.6 per cent., are fully German, although the German population numbers only 22.5 per cent. of the total population of the Republic. There are also 10 training colleges for German teachers, 52 German agricultural schools, 48 commercial colleges, and 98 technical and industrial training colleges, in addition to one German university, two technical universities, an academy of music, an academy of art, and two seminaries.

Economic Grievances

A visit to the German areas of Bohemia reveals a heartrending picture of poverty and distress. Everywhere one sees deserted factories, silent looms, empty pit-

heads, smokeless chimneys. Some of the industrial centres resemble the distressed areas of England and Wales. Yet ten years ago many of these districts were prosperous and their population was busy. What has happened?

A large part of the Czechoslovak industries, particularly the textile, glass, and mining industries, are centred in the German areas. This is partly due to the historical fact that the textile industry, growing up among the poor hill peasants who needed a supplementary income, was the first to create, here as everywhere, conditions in which other industries could settle. In addition, the frontier zone contains the bulk of the coal, iron, and other industrial raw materials of Czechoslovakia. As a result, these areas are among the most intensely industrialized in Europe. Even in pre-war days their industries were far too large to exist on the supply of the markets of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the war, when these markets were divided into several small units, the Czechoslovak industries became even more dependent on exports; and the slump which began in 1929 and was aggravated by the growth of economic nationalism throughout Europe hit these areas with exceptional force.

In February 1933 the Czechoslovak unemployment figure reached its peak with 920,000 people out of work; more than half of these were Germans. The world-wide recovery which has recently begun has been mainly one of internal prosperity in each country, while international trade has improved less. Industries which depend for their employment almost exclusively on export—the Czechoslovak industry shares this disability with the Lancashire cotton industry, among many others—have

recovered more slowly from the depression than those which produce mainly for the home market.

In those hill districts where poverty is more or less permanent, the stoppage of exports brought about conditions verging on famine. The State distributes both food and relief payment, but the share of each family is so small that it barely prevents the people from dying of hunger. Resistance to diseases has accordingly declined, especially among the children. It is not hard to understand that the blame for these hardships is popularly laid at the door of the Government. In their despair the people firmly believe that the Czechs wish to exterminate them.

The dreadful change is felt even more deeply in those industrial districts which until 1929 were prosperous. Again the chief reason for the present distress is the loss of export markets. Germany, in particular, used to absorb the major part of the Bohemian output; that trade was destroyed by the German financial crisis of 1930. In round figures, Czechoslovak exports to Germany amounted to 4,000 million crowns in 1929, and fell to 1,000 million crowns, or one-fourth, in 1930. They have since remained approximately at the lower figure. In other markets Bohemian goods have been displaced by either Japanese or German goods.

German competition in the Balkan markets became overwhelming after 1933, when Dr. Schacht introduced the new policy of buying up the large raw material surpluses of the south-eastern countries, withholding payments, and compelling the creditors to take German goods in settlement of debts. Governments and private firms in Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey had to place their orders in Germany, even

though the tenders from other countries, including Czechoslovakia, were lower. In this field, too, an improvement has lately set in. The growing demand for raw materials as a result of bad overseas harvests and armament needs has lessened the dependence of the south-eastern states on the German market. They are accordingly in a better position to buy where they wish, and Czechoslovakia is profiting from this change.

But there remains a large residue of distress and poverty. Some of the specialized export industries in the German areas cannot hope to regain their former trade. In others the improvement is still partial. And there are also many cases in which German workers have been permanently displaced by Government actions.

For strategic reasons some works of military importance have been transferred from the frontier districts to other parts of the country. These measures culminated in the National Defence Law of May 1936, which placed the frontier zone under a special administration with wide powers. The new authorities can arrest or deport persons disloyal to the State; they can requisition land and other property for military purposes. There have since been countless stories of discrimination against Germans, of arrests and prosecutions on trivial grounds.

The accidents of business have also frequently turned against the Germans. For example, a busy ironworks employing some 2,000 men at Rothau, near the German frontier, was transferred to Friedek, in a Czech district. It was arranged that 800 of the German workmen should be employed in the new factory, but the workers at Friedek went on strike and enforced a reduction to 200. As the new site of the works is as near the frontier as the old, there is no question of strategic reasons. The

Government seems to have nothing whatever to do with this transfer, which was made by the (German) heads of the firm for business reasons.

Sins of the Past

Broadly speaking, the Government has not neglected the German districts, either in the distribution of unemployment relief or in expenditure on public works. But general statements and average figures can be misleading. The good intentions of the leading statesmen have not always been carried out by the lower authorities. Frequently when a certain sum of money was allocated to a German town for the building of, say, a new post office, and the local unemployed were crowding in to apply for the available jobs, they found that a Czech contractor from another part of the district had secured the order, and had brought along his labourers in lorries.

I have seen a German Deputy, who had staked his career on appealing for loyal co-operation with the Czechs, in tears while he told a Czech Minister of such an occurrence. "You ask us to trust you," he said, "and we accept your assurance that our unemployed men shall not fare worse than yours. What would those 40 or 50 jobs have mattered to you? To my town they would have been a symptom of hope. How can I now go before my constituents and ask them to be patient and loyal? They will shout me down and join the Henlein Party."

Of late a new spirit has appeared on the Czech side, and President Benesh is taking an active interest in these matters. Both he and Dr. Hodza, the Prime Minister, are doing their best to ensure that orders given at the

centre shall not be frustrated locally. They seem to have realized at last that the bitterness which poisons the relations between Germans and Czechs is largely due to an accumulation of small grievances which could be removed by consideration and goodwill.

But the problem is extremely complicated. I was shown a petition from a local association of German building contractors drawing attention to the fact that the contract for a new revenue office in a German town was in danger of being awarded to a Czech firm. The Minister who had received this petition was a German ; he was most anxious to help. But the petition itself showed that every one of the German tenders was higher by at least 200,000 crowns than the highest Czech tender. How could he ask the Government to spend that extra sum merely to please the German contractors ? But this is where the complication comes in. In practice, the Czech contractor could count on being allowed by the Czech official in charge of the contract to use cheaper material than that specified in the tender, while the German contractor would get no such relief.

Obviously the change of heart at the centre is not enough ; there must be such a change throughout the country before reconciliation becomes possible.

It is only fair to add that the Sudete Germans have never made it easy for the Prague Government to deal justly with them. Their concrete demands have always been backed by resentment against the very existence of the Czechoslovak State. At the end of the war many of them desired union with Austria or Germany. If it had not been the end of a war in which Austria and Germany were defeated, there might have been much to be said for such a solution. In race, language, and culture the

Sudete Germans belong to the German people as fully as the Austrians, or the scattered German settlements along the Danube. But the Czech leaders successfully argued that the Sudete Germans had never belonged either to Germany or to Austria except as part and parcel of the Bohemian Crownlands.

The Czechs further impressed the Peace Conference with the argument that the mountain range framing Bohemia was the only possible frontier for the new State. Without it, Czechoslovakia would be at the mercy of Germany. The German frontiers would have been moved up to the heart of Europe, leaving the Danubian Basin open to the German grasp. The new organization of Central Europe, which was intended to end the German and Austrian domination of the non-German peoples, and to give the latter freedom and security, would have been undermined from the outset. These strategic and political considerations, added to obvious economic arguments, carried the day. They are still as impressive as they were at the time of the Peace Conference.

But the Sudete Germans never fully accepted their new position. Distrusting the Czechs, they made it difficult for the Czechs to trust them.

It must be stressed that the legitimate grievances of the Sudete Germans are mild when measured by present Central European standards. Discrimination and lack of consideration are set off against a good deal of tolerance and liberty. The Germans are fully represented in local and provincial governments, in the Diet and Senate, and in the Cabinet. They have a very large Press, which is free to criticize, and often to abuse, the Government. They make ample use of the opportunities afforded by

Czechoslovak democracy. What totalitarian state, for instance, would permit a party that carried on a fierce campaign of denunciation against the government, such as the Henlein Party in Czechoslovakia, to maintain large offices in the centre of the capital, where any foreign visitor might walk in to be offered a wide choice of propaganda pamphlets and books?

But, as things are, it is most undesirable that the Sudete Germans should have any legitimate grievances at all. In their present state of mind they provide the Nazis of Germany with a splendid pretext for keeping alive hostility towards Czechoslovakia, a hostility which might easily lead to an explosion.

The Agreement of February 1937

For more than ten years the representatives of three German parties—the German Agrarians, the Christian Social Party, and the Social Democrats—have been members of the Government coalition and of the Cabinet. These “Activists”—so called to distinguish them from the “Negativists”—were supported until 1933 by 65 per cent. of the German-speaking electorate. They still sent three Ministers into the Cabinet, but in the elections of May 1935 they gained less than 40 per cent. of the German vote. Over 60 per cent. went to the new “*Sudetendeutsche Partei*” led by Konrad Henlein. The new Party refused to co-operate. Its attitude caused a dangerous deadlock.

In November 1936 the Prime Minister asked the three German members of the Cabinet to submit a memorandum on the complaints of the German minority. This was duly drawn up by the leaders of the three “Activist”

Parties, and formed the basis of a Government proclamation which, in February 1937, laid down new principles of minority policy. The proclamation covers six main points :

(1) In the placing of Government contracts, local enterprise and local workers shall have first consideration.

(2) Social welfare and health services, especially child relief, shall be administered by Germans wherever they form a majority.

(3) More Civil Service appointments are to be given to Germans. The language tests will be made easier : the knowledge of Czech required is to be gauged merely by the actual needs of the position for which the candidates are applying. However, appointment is made conditional on loyalty to the State.

(4) Public bodies and organs in the German areas are ordered to annex German translations to all official communications without special request, and free of charge.

(5) The Government will allocate funds for the educational needs of the minority.

(6) The Government promises to investigate and remove shortcomings in local government practice which damage the interests of the national minorities.

The principles thus laid down are to be valid for all minorities in Czechoslovakia.

The importance of this agreement is not lowered by the fact that the Czechoslovak Government did not think of it until strong pressure was exerted from outside. Nor can the Government be blamed for making the agree-

ment only with the three smaller German parties. These had in ten years of co-operation gained the confidence of the Government, while the Henlein Party was still new and its programme was vague and sweeping. The Prime Minister nevertheless invited Herr Henlein's delegates to take part in the agreement, but they refused, declaring that the problem could only be solved by the grant of autonomy to the German community.

Some improvement has already taken place as a result of the agreement. Employment of German workers has greatly increased. Complaints of petty persecution have become much more infrequent. A hard struggle is going on between the responsible Czech statesmen and the executive organs who tend to obstruct the new regulations. In the words of President Benesh, the problem is largely "a question of reasonable political practice."

There is another more important question involved. Assuming that by "reasonable political practice" the worst grievances of the Germans are remedied, will the bulk of the community forsake the aggressive nationalism of Herr Henlein and return to constructive co-operation? Or have the visions conjured up by Henlein and his friends sunk so deeply into the souls of the Sudete Germans that material improvements can no longer make any difference? That question, one of the most ominous in Europe to-day, can be judged only after an examination of the principles sustaining Henlein's *Sudetendeutsche Partei*.

IX

HENLEIN AND HIS PARTY

Origins

ALTHOUGH the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (S.d.P.) has much in common with the German Nazi movement, it is not merely an imitation, but has its own roots and its own political vision. It arose out of the romantic youth movement which swept both Germany and the German parts of Austria-Hungary in the decade before the war. While Hitler and his friends merely exploited the idealism engendered by this movement and sought their real backing in military and industrial quarters, the S.d.P. owes its rise directly to the youth movement. Its nucleus was formed by young men who returned from the war to find that they had become a minority in an alien state. A fanatic nationalism was inbred in these Germans on the language frontier ; they despised the Czechs, exalted their own race, and refused to have anything to do with the Czechoslovak Republic. For some years they were content with spreading German folk-songs and folk-lore, strolling in romantic oblivion with their guitars through the Bohemian forests.

Gradually the loose groupings of the youth movement were tightened up into disciplined unions, each owing allegiance to an exalted *Führer*, or leader. Obedience and

secrecy became accepted rules, adorned with all the trappings of second-hand mysticism. Blood-curling oaths were sworn by the camp-fire; veins were cut with ceremonial daggers to seal a secret blood-brotherhood according to supposed Germanic rites. But in the long run such make-believe could not satisfy the more serious among that gifted community.

Some made contact with Hitler and the Nazi movement in the Reich. A National Socialist Party had indeed existed among the Sudete Germans before Hitler was heard of. It now offered its services to Hitler. But the greater part of the Bohemian youth movement refused to accept Hitler's overlordship. To them Vienna was nearer than Berlin or Munich; Bohemia was their ancient fatherland; they were ardent Roman Catholics and objected strongly to the militarism and anti-clericalism of the German Nazis. This trend founds its centre in the *Kameradschaftsbund*, or "Comrades' Union," founded soon after the war by Heinrich Rutha, an interior decorator from Kunersdorf in North Bohemia.

Rutha, who had a fine voice and was an expert guitar player, enjoyed great popularity. He was joined by Walter Heinrich, a young Bohemian who had just completed his studies at the Vienna University and brought news that a new prophet had arisen. The prophet was Othmar Spann, a professor of history at the Vienna University. Soon many young Sudete Germans were sitting at the feet of Spann, drinking in the wisdom which was to fill their empty lives with a political purpose.

Othmar Spann * taught that Democracy, Liberalism, and Marxism were the scourges of mankind, from which

* For Spann's principal theory see his book, *Der Wahre Staat*, published by Gustav Fischer, Jena.

it would be saved only by a new social idea, the idea of the *Ständestaat*, involving the organization of the State according to professions or *Stände* instead of parties and classes. The highest profession or *Stand* was the *Staatsstand*, comprising the leaders who, under a supreme Führer, must have a monopoly in directing policy. Once the German nation has been reorganized on these lines it can tackle its international mission.

"I foresee a revival of the period of the mediæval German Emperors," writes Spann. "Germany has come out of the world war as the largest and ablest Continental Power, for the future of France is only that of a second Spain. The task of the Hapsburg Empire has been inherited by Germany. Europe has been Balkanized right up to Prague and Warsaw. No one but Germany can, in the long run, create order out of this chaos and subdue the constant disputes between the small nations of Eastern Europe. England is bound to support Germany in this work ; for as long as Germany is busy on the Continent, she will not aim at sea power and overseas possessions. And indeed it is only in Eastern Europe that Germany can find her natural mission. To-day we understand clearly why Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, the Southern Slavs, and even Greece, were at one time German fiefs ; that is how it must be again."

Spann found fervent disciples among the members of the "Comrades' Union." There his books were closely studied, his teachings were explained by lectures and debated in secret conferences. The Union, headed by Rutha and Heinrich, became an organization for the practical execution of Spann's ideas.

Preparations completed, the Comrades invaded the existing associations of the Czechoslovak Germans. They wormed their way into the leading positions of the various

cultural and political bodies. At that stage Rutha realized that political power in Bohemia could only be achieved through the gymnastic associations, or *Turnvereine*. He looked for a suitable man to make this new conquest, and he found him in the person of his friend Konrad Henlein, who had previously taken little part in the development of the Comrades' ideas.

The Leader

Stolid, honest, and rather dull, Konrad Henlein bears no resemblance to the familiar type of dictators. He wears spectacles and moves with a suggestion of the goose-step. In private, he talks quietly and seriously. In public, he reads his speeches from a typed script, occasionally striking out with a sudden movement as if he had just remembered that the public speaker is expected to show liveliness. It is only when he speaks to small meetings of simple country folk that he lets himself go ; and then he merely doles out a series of familiar sentences like this : "Let's all stand together, brothers, then we need no programme." But his simplicity and lack of intellectual airs gain him the confidence of the masses.

Henlein's strength is his ability as an organizer. He shines in the committee room. There he can be firm and even dictatorial. He has written very little apart from occasional articles in his magazine. In these he calls for a struggle against Liberalism, Pacifism, Marxism, Americanism, Bolshevism, Democracy, and the falling birth-rate. He wants a "healthy, hard-living youth" and preaches the heroic life. He has no use for the development of individual personalities ; that is disguised Liberalism. "We know that the un-German

parliamentarism and the un-German party system which are splitting up our people into unorganic sections will break down. Our time is governed by disciplined associations of masses : Fascism, Heimwehr, Hitlerism. Men want to be led in a manly way."

These are Henlein's principal ideas, and even these he acknowledges to have received from Rutha. But for all his limitations, Henlein is a man of purpose and integrity. He is an idealist of that dangerous type which is untrammelled by the worry and pain of having to create its own ideas.

When Rutha called on Henlein to take his part in the Comrades' scheme, the latter was a bank clerk in Reichenberg. He was also an unpaid instructor in the local gymnastic society ; now he gave up his job to become a paid instructor at Asch. With the help of the Comrades, Henlein quickly rose to a leading position in the central gymnastic society, which comprised more than 100,000 members. By 1929 the Comrades had carried two of the posts in the leading Triumvirate of the society. They proceeded to reorganize it as a political vanguard of the Spann doctrine. Henlein was reinforced by Dr. Walter Brandt, a capable youth who had taken his degree with Spann in Vienna. In 1933 the Comrades began a whirlwind campaign to proclaim Henlein supreme "Führer" of the Sudete Germans.

Henlein was soon given a fine opportunity, which he was quick to grasp. When in October 1933 the Nazi and Nationalist parties fell under a ban, Henlein at once formed a "United Home Front" and appealed for the support of all Sudete Germans. He had already obtained, through the gymnastic society and the Comrades' Union, considerable political support, and he now inherited

the bulk of the two dissolved parties. The former Nazi leaders—Krebs, Jung, and Viererbl—had fled to Germany.

But though Henlein and the "Spann circle" carried the day, friction soon broke out between them and the Nazis who had joined the new organization. Prominent among the Sudete Nazis is Rudolf Kasper, a trade union leader whose ideas are those of the left wing of Hitler's Party. Kasper, supported by his exiled friends in the Reich, has given Henlein a great deal of trouble. In 1934 he forced the leader to dismiss Walter Brandt (who was sent to London by way of compromise). Kasper and his colleagues, Kreissl and Jonak, were then admitted into the governing committee of the S.d.P. Of late Berlin has strongly pressed for unity, and less is heard of friction within the Henlein movement. But the conflict between the Spann circle and the Nazis is not easily bridged.

Henlein has evaded that issue by adopting the Nazi ideal of *Volksgemeinschaft*, meaning the brotherhood of all Germans irrespective of class, religion, or party. On the strength of this appeal he obtained for the S.d.P. more than 60 per cent. of the German vote in the 1935 elections.

The Demands

Henlein himself did not enter Parliament. He maintains his hold over the Deputies of the S.d.P. by asking each candidate on his nomination to sign a "declaration of honour," promising to resign his seat whenever requested by the Leader to do so. From the nebulous appeal for the unity of all Sudete Germans he has proceeded to a slightly more concrete programme. The main point of his platform is the demand for racial

autonomy (*Völkische Selbstverwaltung*). The meaning of this phrase was outlined by Henlein in a speech at Aussig on March 1, 1937, as follows :

Czechoslovakia is not a nation-state in which the indigenous race can claim all political, economic and social power. The Czechs should realize that the State does not belong to them alone, but jointly to all the peoples forming it. "Unity of the State ; but freedom for its peoples." The Germans demand that their equality of rights and status within the Republic should be laid down by a Czech-German Treaty and receive confirmation by law. In particular, they demand a final demarcation of their "Language Frontier," which should secure them against Czech encroachment. Without prejudice to the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak State, its German citizens should be recognized as a body of public law with a central authority able to represent the entire German community within the Republic and to collaborate with German communities outside the State in all non-political matters. Germans should be allowed to administrate the German zones, and to share in the direction of policy at the centre.

Some of these points have since been elaborated in a number of parliamentary draft bills. But it is obvious that the Prague Government cannot consider the demand for autonomy in the present political conditions, quite apart from its immense practical difficulties. The limit of the concessions which the Government can reasonably be expected to make is probably defined by a phrase occurring in a speech made by Dr. Krofta, the Foreign Minister, on May 21, 1936 : "The Germans are not a mere minority, but the second nation of our State." But to-day this phrase denotes a promise rather than a fact.

What can be done ?

The Czechs have very good reasons for suspecting that the creation of something like a German *land* within the Czechoslovak Republic would deliver the country into the hands of the German Reich.

For it is not only the common language and culture which binds the S.d.P. to the neighbouring Reich : political agents travel to and fro ; advice on methods of campaigning is given to the S.d.P. from Berlin and Munich ; a Sudete German legion, parallel to the Austrian legion, has been formed in the Reich. I have seen evidence which proves that young men are recruited in the Sudete regions, ostensibly as workmen, but actually to be trained for military service in Germany.

Nor can the Czechoslovak authorities take any comfort from the public speeches of Henlein and his lieutenants, which differ greatly from the restrained lectures they are accustomed to deliver on their journeys to foreign countries. Here are three examples :

Henlein, August 10, 1936, in Dessendorf : " There are matters which cannot be discussed in public, just as in a front trench one does not speak of a coming offensive two days ahead."

K. H. Frank, April 11, 1937, in Karlsbad : " The S.d.P. is now in its final period before the fight, and it is only a matter of a few weeks' patience."

H. Rutha, April 13, 1937, in Marienbad : " Whether or not the Sudete German problem can be finally solved depends on the steadfastness of our Party members until December of the current year."

All this is not meant to suggest that the Sudete Germans are hopelessly intractable, or that the Czechs' policy

towards them has been justified. That policy is, in fact, by no means free of responsibility for the present deadlock. If the genuine German grievances had been tackled years ago, Henlein and his friends might not have found the Sudete electorate receptive to desperate counsels. But, taking things as they are, any constructive collaboration between the authorities and the Henlein Party presents almost insuperable difficulties.

What is to be done? The Czechs can only hope that the faithful execution and further extension of their agreement with the German "activist" parties will lead the more reasonable among the Sudete Germans back to these parties and to willing co-operation with the Government. The experiment has to be tried, and tried with speed and thoroughness. Yet it seems doubtful whether any improvement in their actual living conditions that may reasonably be expected will make the supporters of Henlein give up the extravagant hopes that have been raised. If this view is justified, it means that Czechoslovakia will in future contain a powerful body of people working for the disruption of the State. Concrete grievances can be removed, but between the vision of the disciples of Othmar Spann and the ideals of Czechoslovak democracy there can be no bridge.

Nor is it certain that Germany would give up her hostility towards Czechoslovakia even if every one of the practical demands of the Sudete Germans were satisfied. The German ambition to dominate South-East Europe rests on historical and geographical foundations; the German desire to subdue Czechoslovakia rests on the elementary demands of strategy. Germany cannot cease to struggle against a Czechoslovakia linked with France and Russia, because it is an arrow pointed at her

heart. If Czechoslovakia could be separated from her two powerful friends and transformed into a vassal of German policy, the present rulers of Germany would most probably be ready to sacrifice the Sudete Germans, just as they sacrificed the Germans in Poland, for the sake of a greater scheme. To reverse that argument : whatever Czechoslovakia might do to deprive Germany of a *legitimate* excuse for interference, she could have only a faint hope of buying off German Imperialism.

LATER EVENTS

Heinrich Rutha, arrested on a criminal charge unconnected with politics, hanged himself in his prison cell. For a time the party was rent with personal and political quarrels, and at the beginning of 1938 optimists believed that Henlein was losing grip. However, the German conquest of Austria roused the Sudete Germans to greater ambitions than they had dared to entertain at any time since the war. Inspired partly by pride, partly by fear, thousands rushed to join Henlein's party ; the two larger of the " Activist " German parties left the government coalition to join the opposition and thus added their weight to Henlein's demands. These have since been put forward with greatly increased force, though without greater precision, than before the Austro-German union. " Autonomy " is still the chief demand, but assertions of loyalty to the Czechoslovak State have been forgotten, and the power of the enlarged German Reich is more and more openly invoked in pressing for concessions. The Czechoslovak reactions to the new threat are discussed in the concluding chapter.

X

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

Three Pillars of Policy

CZECHOSLOVAKIA lies close to three Great Powers—Germany, Russia, Italy. It lies at the cross-roads of three European civilizations—the German, the Slav, and the Latin. It lies at the junction of four trends of political expansion—the German, the French, the Italian, and the Russian.

The control of Czechoslovakia is necessary to Germany for any further expansion towards the east or south-east. It could be achieved either by force or by diplomacy ; by conquering the country or by isolating it.

To Soviet Russia, Czechoslovakia is vital as an advanced defensive bulwark against German expansion ; for after the fall of that fortress Germany would have an open road to the Black Sea and the Soviet Ukraine.

France values Czechoslovakia for two reasons. One is that the reduction of Czechoslovakia by Germany would remove that threat to the German rear which is an important guarantee of French security ; and that the unhampered access to the raw material and fuel resources of South-East Europe would place Germany in a position of superior military strength.

The second reason is that French leadership in Continental affairs depends on her hold over the small countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The withdrawal of France from these regions would spell German domination, which would reduce France to a secondary place in Europe. And Czechoslovakia is the keystone of the French scheme.

Italy, following in the footsteps of ancient Rome, covets a leading position in the Danubian Basin and the Balkans. For some years after the war she solicited the friendship of Czechoslovakia as much as that of other South-Eastern countries. When friction arose between Italy and France, Italian policy concentrated on those countries—Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria—where it was not frustrated by French influence. Italian opposition to French policy led to a cooling-off of relations with Czechoslovakia; this trend has lately been reinforced by Italy's desire to please Germany and to deflect German expansion from Austria.

These fundamental conditions determine the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia. Isolated, she is at the mercy of Germany. Allied to France only, she would be exposed to every fluctuation of Franco-German relations. Czechoslovakia must, therefore, strive for the support of as many powers as possible, selecting at the same time those powers which are interested in the maintenance of the present division of Central and South-Eastern Europe into independent nation-states. Collective security, with a bias towards the rigid maintenance of the European status created by the Peace Treaties, must be the mainstay of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. She has, in fact, been among the staunchest supporters of the League of Nations from the moment of its foundations.

“The first pillar of our policy has always been, and will always continue to be, the League of Nations as the focus of the policies that seek mutual agreement and equilibrium among the great powers, and as a guarantee of the position and influence of the smaller states and nations.” (Dr. Benesh.)

The second pillar of Czechoslovak policy is the Little Entente. That name covers the Czechoslovak treaties of alliance with Yugoslavia in 1920 and with Rumania in 1921, originally directed against Hungary's efforts to regain the territory lost at the end of the war. The Little Entente has since been developed into a fairly compact union of the three States, with a Standing Council, a permanent secretariat, an Economic Council, and machinery for consultation between the General Staffs. Many attempts have been made by Germany and Italy, often with the support of Poland, to break the Little Entente in order to deal with each member-state separately. These efforts have not been entirely unsuccessful. Yugoslavia, in particular, follows to some extent an independent line of policy. She has established friendly political relations, and very close economic relations, with Germany at a time when German-Czechoslovak relations were notoriously bad. She has also concluded, at the beginning of 1937, a political and commercial agreement with Italy at a time when Italian relations with Czechoslovakia were openly unfriendly.

As for Rumania, she has gone through a brief period of flirtation with Germany and returned to firm friendship with Czechoslovakia. At the same time she maintains good relations with Italy, and is allied to Poland by a military agreement. Nor has Rumania seen her way

to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with Soviet Russia on the model of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Pact. For all this, Rumania vividly remembers the German occupation and the Peace Treaty of Bucharest, which brought home to her what kind of treatment she might expect if Germany were again in a position to impose her own territorial settlement on South-East Europe.

In fact, the community of interests and the affinity of popular feeling in the three countries are still very much stronger than the differences of day-to-day policy. During the past year or two the military co-operation of the three General Staffs has grown more intimate; military equipment in many branches of the three armies has been aligned to a common standard, and each depends on the other two for vital armament supplies. The strain is evident; but the structure has not cracked under it.

The third point of support for Czechoslovak policy is the alliance with France. The two countries are linked by a bond stronger than any treaty: the knowledge that the defeat of one would be a mortal blow to the other. In January 1924 a treaty of alliance and friendship was concluded; in October 1925 it was strengthened by a pact of mutual assistance, annexed to the Locarno Treaties, which provides for joint action in the case of a German attack on either country. From the beginning Czechoslovakia has leaned heavily on France. A French military mission is permanently established in Prague; French advice and assistance, both in military and political matters, has helped to put the new Republic on its feet. Cultural relations between the two countries are very close, and their European policies, on the whole, run on identical lines.

If Germany attacks Czechoslovakia, France is committed to military intervention. She has not forgotten her promise. As recently as May 1937, a French delegate at the Congress of Czechoslovak Social Democrats in Prague delivered the following message from M. Blum, the then Premier of France :

"Should Czechoslovakia be attacked by an army, France would act as if she herself had been attacked."

The fact that the security of Czechoslovakia is virtually identical with the security of France is deeply felt by a wide circle of Frenchmen. It is not a question of political sympathy, but of national necessity. It does not concern this or that French party, but the French General Staff and permanent diplomacy, whose views on foreign affairs are likely to prevail in emergencies.

It is a popular belief in Britain that the French commitments in Central and Eastern Europe are a cause of the present international unrest. If France, it is said, would only leave Eastern Europe alone, we could live in peace. People who talk in this way are forgetting that Eastern Europe is not Britain's to give away. The suggestion that France should give up what is essential to her security as a Great Power is as preposterous as might be a French suggestion that Great Britain should give up her interests in the Mediterranean because they tend to provoke a war with Italy. Czechoslovakia is the Gibraltar of France.

That is the chief reason why a military attack on Czechoslovakia is more than likely to produce a general European war. It should be remembered that French assistance to Czechoslovakia could only take the form of a major war with Germany. As long as the Rhineland zone was demilitarized, French armies could at any time

descend into the industrial centres of Western Germany without encountering serious resistance. But since March 7, 1936, the Rhineland frontier has been heavily fortified, and it is occupied by a strong German force. Any French move, therefore, would precipitate a big war.

It is, of course, possible to visualize the future in a different way. The Germans, for instance, firmly believe that France is approaching bankruptcy and civil war. They believe, moreover, that a German-Italian victory in Spain would paralyse France by creating a permanent threat in her rear. The Berlin perspective includes also an upheaval in Soviet Russia, and the final entry of Poland into the German camp, as well as the break-up of the Little Entente.

Whether any of these expectations will be fulfilled only the future can show. It is true that the result of the Spanish Civil War will have a great influence on future developments in Europe. But unless and until France has altogether lost all claims to be a Great Power in Europe, it is reasonable to assume that she will fight to prevent the German domination of Europe which would follow the fall of Czechoslovakia.

The Franco-German struggle is at the root of the European tension. In population and fighting power Germany is stronger than France. In diplomacy (which counts as much as battalions) France is stronger than Germany. France relies on alliances to prevent Germany from gaining overwhelming strength; Germany tries to isolate France in order to rule the Continent. It is no use for Great Britain to pretend that she can break that fundamental deadlock of Europe. Even her intervention on the French side in the world war has not made any real difference to the problem. But for her own security and

that of her Empire Britain will ultimately have to fight once again in a war which might leave the deadlock still unbroken—unless it should produce a social upheaval of such strength and extent that nationalism becomes a thing of the past.

As long as Germany and France remain engulfed in nationalism, no more than a temporary stabilization of the European balance is possible. And Czechoslovakia remains the keystone of the arch.

Relations with Soviet Russia

Czechoslovakia's relations with the Soviet Union demand a closer study, partly because of their military significance and partly because they have deepened Germany's hostility towards Czechoslovakia to the point of dangerous tension. Ever since May 1935, when a pact of mutual assistance between the Governments of Prague and Moscow was concluded, the German Press has incessantly accused Czechoslovakia of being the tool of aggressive Soviet designs, the gateway of Bolshevism, and a vanguard of world revolution.

German newspapers and, in some cases, German Ministers have asserted that Soviet officers are busy training the Czechoslovak army, advising the Prague command on the erection of frontier fortifications, and supervising the building of secret aerodromes destined to be placed at the disposal of the Soviet Air Force.

It should be remembered that until 1934 Czechoslovakia had not even restored normal diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The traditions of the Czechoslovak Legion which had fought against the Bolsheviks from 1918 to 1920 were too strong for the Prague

Government to make any approach to Moscow. On the other hand, Germany established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1922, by the Treaty of Rapallo. The Berlin Treaty of 1926 placed German-Soviet relations on a basis of close friendship, and it is no secret that the collaboration between the Reichswehr and the Red Army was for many years exceedingly intimate. Germany helped to build up the Soviet Air Force and the Soviet munition industries; German officers were attached to the Red Army for certain periods to be trained in those arms which Germany was forbidden to maintain herself.

If it was an offence for any western nation to "let the Soviets intrude into European affairs," as German opinion asserts in its accusations against France and Czechoslovakia, surely this offence was first committed by Germany herself. Germany made her peace with Moscow in 1922, when the other powers were still trying to isolate Soviet Russia from Europe by a *cordon sanitaire*. Germany signed the Berlin Treaty in 1926, when Trotsky's policy of kindling world revolution was not yet superseded by Stalin's policy of consolidating the Soviet system in Russia alone. Nor was the Soviet Union at that time a member of the League of Nations.

The Berlin Treaty was actually renewed by Herr Hitler's Government in 1933. Hitler himself explained this move as follows: "The fight against Communism is our own internal affair, in which we shall never permit any interference from outside. The political relations of the State with other powers with whom we have interests in common are not thereby affected."

Soon after these words were spoken, a change occurred in German policy towards Soviet Russia. Hitler's idea

of securing new territories for "German colonization in Russia and her tributary states" (*Mein Kampf*) was revived. At the 1933 World Economic Conference in London the German delegation submitted a memorandum suggesting that the economic difficulties of Germany could never be fully solved until she had gained permanent control of new sources of raw materials in South-East Europe and Southern Russia. Although the memorandum was withdrawn when its unfortunate effect on world opinion had been realized, Russian suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. During this same Conference M. Litvinov hurriedly negotiated pacts of non-aggression with Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Turkey, among others.

In 1934 M. Barthou, the French Foreign Minister, made a determined effort to reinforce the security of France. He tried to bring about a collective security pact for East and South-East Europe. There is little doubt that he never expected Germany to accept these proposals, but hoped to complete the network of pacts without her, thus bringing about a new "encirclement of Germany" under the wing of the League of Nations. British diplomacy for a time supported these efforts in a half-hearted manner. When it was seen that not only Germany, but Poland as well, refused to join the pact, M. Barthou made contact with Soviet Russia.

The Soviet leaders eagerly seized the opportunity of increasing Russia's security by a pact which would link up the stability of Eastern Europe with the interests of Western Europe. It was about that time that M. Litvinov coined the phrase "peace is indivisible." It meant, among other things, that Russia did not wish to stand alone if she were attacked by Germany, Japan, or both. In order

to facilitate co-operation with the Western powers Soviet Russia became a member of the League of Nations.

M. Barthou's plan prospered, and when Germany announced her scheme of universal military conscription the pace was forced. Italy was brought into the net—but at that moment M. Barthou was assassinated at Marseilles together with King Alexander of Yugoslavia.

His successor, M. Laval, did not follow up the Barthou scheme. He tried to gain an understanding with Germany while maintaining precautions against her. A new and less rigid security pact was drafted and once again offered to Germany. But Germany declined the new pact as she had declined the old, and for the same reason: that it would perpetuate a state of affairs in the East which she regarded as iniquitous. Poland and the Baltic States held aloof, determined to wait and see how the Franco-German struggle developed. What remained of the French scheme was a pact of mutual assistance between France and the Soviet Union.

The pact was initialled on May 2, 1935, by M. Laval, who bowed reluctantly to the urgent entreaties of the French General Staff. A good deal has been made lately of the fact that both France and Soviet Russia have "Left" régimes, the inference being that their alliance is based on the similarity of political outlook. Actually the French Governments in whose name Barthou prepared, and Laval signed, the pact with Moscow had no Socialist or Communist members. And it was the Sarraut-Flandin Government, a Government of the Right and Centre, which obtained the ratification of the pact from the French Parliament a few days after March 7, 1936, when Germany denounced the Locarno Treaties

and occupied the Rhineland. The swing to the Left in French politics occurred when the treaty was already ratified ; and it is noticeable that the succeeding Popular Front governments firmly declined to supplement the pact by a military convention.

Czechoslovakia came into this pact only as the ally of France. A fortnight after the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact Dr. Benesh signed a similar pact with M. Litvinov. It was made dependent on the Franco-Soviet and Czechoslovak-French Treaties as well as on the League Covenant. It differs, in fact, from the general obligation of collective assistance to a victim of aggression contained in the Covenant only in one point : the signatories are bound to go to each other's assistance without waiting for the League Council to establish the fact of aggression. That is the only new point ; but it makes all the difference between a nebulous moral obligation and a defensive military alliance.

Bismarck knew what he was saying when he warned his successors to prevent at all costs any alliance between a Western and an Eastern power over the head of Germany. It was the fact that such an alliance had occurred in 1935 which shocked Nazi Germany. All other objections, such as the alleged danger of a spread of Communist agitation, are merely incidental. It is not so much the danger of a Russian thrust through Czechoslovakia which is worrying Germany, as the knowledge that her own movements, either diplomatic or military, are hemmed in as long as the *status quo* is defended by a powerful coalition.

The Czechs have done all they could to disprove the allegations raised by German propaganda. For instance, the German military attaché in Prague refused the oppor-

tunity of visiting without previous notice any place at which he suspected a "secret Soviet aerodrome" to exist. No such aerodrome has, in fact, been discovered by anybody. As for the alleged military co-operation between Czechoslovakia and Russia, no secret has been made of the fact that delegations of Russian officers have visited Prague and studied the Czechoslovak defence system. It is not easy to guess how much information these visitors were given, or how much of their advice was taken. In principle, such advice is a matter for the French military mission which is permanently established in Prague.

As for Communism in Czechoslovakia, nothing could be more in contrast with the facts than to picture that stolid, comfort-loving, bourgeois nation as a hotbed of revolutionary doctrines. While most other countries of Central Europe have had their Communist revolutions, Czechoslovakia has been singularly free from such movements. The Communist Party is small and powerless; its occasional proposals for the formation of a "Popular Front" have always been turned down by the Socialists, who belong to the broad Government coalition. For several years past there has not been a single Communist demonstration, let alone a clash with the police. The problem of Communism simply does not exist in Czechoslovakia.

There remains the question whether the Red Army would actually march if Czechoslovakia were attacked. The Soviet leaders would be faced with this dilemma: They could not be certain that Russian intervention would turn the scale, as Russia has never fought a successful war outside her own frontiers. Not having a common frontier with Czechoslovakia, they would have to send

their armies across Rumania, with all the difficulties of control and communications which that would entail. On the other hand, if Russia allowed Czechoslovakia to be overrun by Germany, her southern provinces, especially the Ukraine, would be exposed to the next German thrust. It might also be difficult for the Soviet leaders—as it was in the case of Spain—to restrain the popular enthusiasm for any fight “against Fascism”; or to put it in the opposite way: inactivity in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia might bring the ever-latent “Trotskyist” crisis down upon Stalin’s head. Nor should it be forgotten that pre-war Russia was the first European power to move when the 1914 ultimatum of Austria-Hungary brought home to the Russian General Staff the danger of German-Austrian domination of South-East Europe. On balance, therefore, it is likely that Soviet Russia would intervene if Czechoslovakia were attacked by a German army.

Austria, Hungary, Poland

Although Czechoslovakia had come to life on the ruins of Austrian power, hostility between the two countries soon gave way to an amicable understanding. In 1920 Dr. Renner, the Austrian Chancellor, visited Prague, where many of the problems caused by the break-up of the close partnership were settled by agreement. In 1921 a political treaty was signed in which Czechoslovakia and Austria undertook to guarantee each other’s territories and to remain neutral in case of war.

Czechoslovakia, however, has from the beginning offered the strongest opposition to all attempts either to incorporate Austria with Germany or to restore the

Habsburg Monarchy. Serious tension arose in 1931 when Germany and Austria announced their intention to form a customs union. That project never materialized, but Czechoslovakia has not relaxed her hostility towards similar efforts. The reason is found on the map of Europe: if Austria were to move into the German political orbit, the best part of Czechoslovakia would be entirely surrounded by German territory.

Compared with this danger, the prospect of a Habsburg restoration in Vienna has appeared to some Czechoslovaks as the lesser evil. In the present European situation such a restoration could have but one meaning: to strengthen Austria against German efforts to subdue her. In itself this purpose would suit Czechoslovakia very well, but there is another side to the question. The name of Habsburg recalls to the Czechs three hundred years of subjection—and the Czechs, like the Irish, think in terms of centuries. They are suspicious; they fear that by permitting the return of the Habsburgs to Vienna they might admit the thin end of a dangerous wedge.

The Austrian monarchists have given public assurances to the effect that the restored Monarch would be satisfied with the present frontiers of Austria and never seek to regain the former possessions of his House outside those frontiers. Well and good; but the Pretender himself, the young and spirited Archduke Otto, has been very indiscreet in private conversations. He has laid himself open to the suspicion that he places little value upon the restrained announcements of his supporters, and that he is more deeply impressed with that ancient family law of the Habsburgs which forbids any of their reigning members to renounce any part of the Crown's dominions. Whatever the rights and wrongs of this question, Czecho-

slovakia remains firmly opposed to the idea of a Habsburg restoration in Austria.

Meanwhile the political and economic relations between the two States continue to improve. But for the frequent interference of Italy, who does not welcome any close understanding among the Danubian countries that is not sponsored and dominated by herself, Austria-Czechoslovak co-operation would have become very close in the past few years. The desire exists on both sides. But Austria is not only restrained by Italian influence ; she hesitates also to offend Hungary by drawing too close to Czechoslovakia. The present efforts of the Austrian Government are therefore directed towards bringing about some measure of reconciliation between Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

From the time of the Treaty of Trianon, which settled the new frontiers of Hungary by depriving that country of almost two-thirds of its former territory, the Hungarians have concentrated with extraordinary unanimity on the recovery of their lost lands. Seeing that Hungary formerly included very large territories inhabited by non-Hungarian races, such as Slovaks, Ruthenians, Rumanians, and Serbs, the restoration of the pre-war frontiers could only be achieved by placing many millions of these races once more under Hungarian domination. That might have been done by force immediately after the war, if the force had been available. To-day the non-Hungarian former subjects of Hungary have won national consciousness and pride ; they would fight one and all to avert a return to their former masters. Of all the territories alienated, those that fell to Czechoslovakia were both the most valuable and dearest to the heart of the Magyars : Slovakia and the Carpathians. Accordingly,

post-war Hungary has been more hostile towards Czechoslovakia than towards Rumania or Yugoslavia. There has been something like a trade war between the two countries for many years, and it was only in 1937 that fresh negotiations for a trade agreement were opened with some hope of success.

It would not be fair to Hungary to lay the blame for the unsatisfactory relations with Czechoslovakia at her door alone. In the first place, although the claim to a restitution of *all* the former Hungarian territories is unjust as well as impracticable, there is much to be said for some less drastic revision of the frontiers. In the case of Czechoslovakia, strategic and economic reasons led to the demarcation of a frontier which brought a considerable Magyar population into Czechoslovak territory. In theory, there is force in the claim that at least the compact Magyar communities in Czechoslovakia should be restored to Hungary. In practice, this would mean depriving Slovakia of her two chief cities, Bratislava and Kosice, and of her outlet to the Danube; and it would cut all communications between Western and Eastern Slovakia. While Czechoslovakia quite naturally refuses even to consider such a scheme, the Hungarians quite naturally demand that justice be done and Czechoslovakia be left to restore the damage as best she can.

Since the death of General Goemboes in 1936 a more progressive mood has emerged in Hungarian politics. Under the impression of a threatening enslavement by Germany, rigid implacability is beginning to make way for a constructive effort. Without renouncing the claim to ultimate frontier revision, Hungary seems now ready to co-operate with Czechoslovakia in a joint effort of all the Danubian States to improve the political and eco-

nomic conditions in that zone. Hungary would, however, raise two major stipulations : (1) That the treaty restrictions on her military forces must be removed ; (2) that the situation of the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, as well as in other countries, should be drastically improved.

The first of these conditions should no longer obstruct a settlement. The rearmament of Hungary cannot be prevented ; it is better for all that it should proceed openly. The position of the Hungarian minorities demands improvement, whether in compliance with Hungarian wishes or in accordance with simple justice. If the Czechoslovak rulers are wise they will not try to extort a high price for the fulfilment of the two Hungarian conditions. The opportunity to strengthen the peace in the Danubian area should not be blocked by Czech parsimony as it has been blocked in the past by Hungarian obstinacy.

Relations with Poland, the north-eastern neighbour, are not happy. Although the two nations are of similar race and language ; although both were reborn as independent states as a result of similar circumstances at the end of the war, they began to quarrel almost as soon as the war was over. The immediate bone of contention was the rich mining district of Teshen, claimed by both. After some bitter fighting, a compromise was made, dividing the district between the two countries. But Poland has not forgotten the disappointment. She is also dissatisfied with the position of the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia.

In this case the concrete grievances are small and might easily be removed by agreement. They have been deliberately exaggerated by Poland in order to justify a

hostility which actually springs from different motives. To put it bluntly, the Poles are anxious to divert German attention from their own frontier regions; they encourage anything that might deflect German energies into a more southerly direction. Although allied to France, who has recently granted large credits for rearmament purposes, the Poles see their best advantage in being on friendly terms with Germany.

But it is not merely the reflection of German foreign policy which prevents Poland from establishing friendly relations with Czechoslovakia. She has plans of her own. Poland aspires to the leadership of Eastern Europe "from the Baltic to the Mediterranean." She would like to organize a broad belt of neutral states between Russia and Germany. And she resents the fact that Czechoslovakia stubbornly upholds a different policy, based on her pacts with France and Soviet Russia.

XI

ATTACK AND DEFENCE

War or " Intervention "

NO survey of the present tension in Central Europe can be complete without an estimate of the military forces that might be engaged, and the strategic problems that would be involved, in a German attempt to subdue Czechoslovakia by force. It is for that purpose, and without any pretence of forecasting actual events, that the following analysis is being made. It is based merely on unofficial information and personal calculations, but it should help to illustrate the extent of the danger involved in a Central European clash.

It is frequently said, both in Germany and elsewhere, that an open war may not be necessary for the achievement of German diplomatic aims. Germany might engineer a rising of the Sudete German community against the Prague Government and secretly supply arms and trained " volunteers." Although such support could not enable the Sudete Germans to defeat the Czechoslovak Army, they could, it is said, harass the Government forces so thoroughly that a subsequent diplomatic intervention by Germany would compel Prague to accept German terms. This scheme is popularly known as " creating a second Spain."

The comparison with Spain, however, is fallacious. The essence of the Spanish situation is that a civil war between two strongly opposed sections of the Spanish people was already latent before one section obtained the help of outside powers in staging a revolution. Such conditions do not exist in Czechoslovakia. There are no strong class differences that might be exploited ; there is no political rivalry which would not immediately disappear under any threat to the independence of the Czechoslovak nation.

A rising in Czechoslovakia would be limited to the German minority of 3.2 millions, reinforced by volunteers from Germany, against a Czechoslovak population of 10,000,000. Although the numbers of the potential insurgents are formidable, their military chances would be small, and that for the following reasons :

For the past four years the frontier organization on the Czechoslovak-German border, both military and civilian, has been thoroughly tightened up. Blockhouses dot the whole of the hilly, well-wooded frontier. Gun-running has been made almost impossible. By the National Defence Law of 1936 a broad zone along the frontier has been placed under military authority, and the police throughout the German districts has been strengthened. Any gathering of Sudete Germans, or any undue influx of German "tourists," would be immediately known to the military intelligence. No doubt a few hundred, and even a few thousand, men could wriggle across the frontier forests by night in spite of the guards ; but it seems impossible to get through such numbers that the local Czech forces would be unable to deal with them.

As for the 3,200,000 Sudete Germans themselves, it should not be forgotten that they are spread in a narrow

belt along 600 miles of the frontier. Only 2.2 millions live in more or less compact areas of Bohemia and Moravia adjoining the German frontier, and 188,000 along the Austrian frontier. The various German districts are intersected by Czech districts, and even the former frequently contain strong Czech minorities, which usually include policemen and officials. Moreover, by no means the whole of the German-speaking community in Czechoslovakia is ready to revolt against the State. There is a strong feeling against domination by the German Reich, both among employed workers and among the owners of industries who stand to lose from incorporation in the Reich, where their worst competitors are situated.

It should be noted also that the Hungarian minority is no longer willing to join any Sudete German rebellion. It is doubtful whether the bulk of the Hungarians were ever inclined to do so ; they are mostly peasants who have much reason to be satisfied with their present conditions as compared with those prevailing in Hungary. But even the political leaders have given up playing with the idea of joining forces with the Germans.

To sum up, a local rising in the Sudete districts could be suppressed without very great difficulty by the local forces ; and infiltration of volunteers from Germany on a scale sufficient to cause serious fighting could not take place.

Once this is admitted, however, any disturbance in the Sudete districts assumes great importance as a prelude to war. Sporadic rioting, compelling the Czech police to use firearms, would, in the first place, arouse strong feeling in Germany ; in the second place, the Germans could represent a subsequent military action

against Czechoslovakia as intervention on behalf of their maltreated blood-brothers beyond the frontier. This would not only ensure enthusiasm for the war in Germany, but possibly sympathies for the German case in other countries.

Military Plans

If Germany decided to attack Czechoslovakia, three main courses would be open to her. (1) A massed air-raid. (2) An invasion through the Moravian Gateway, following the valley of the Oder from the direction of Breslau, and aimed at cutting the country in two. (3) Separate offensives over the passes of Bohemia, centred on the gap made by the Elbe valley. All three plans might be in some measure combined.

What the defences against an attacking air force will be worth under actual war conditions cannot be predicted. Some experts hold that 20 per cent. of the raiding 'planes could be brought down by fighting machines and anti-aircraft guns. Expert opinion counts little in this matter, but assuming that 80 per cent. of the raiders reach their objective, they still have to hit their targets. Before 1914, the proportion of hits made in the British Navy was understood to be 75 per cent. In the naval battles of the world war the proportion of hits actually made is said to have been 2 per cent. In the Spanish Civil War Madrid has been bombed for many months; many buildings have been ruined, thousands have been killed and wounded; yet not only did the bulk of the city remain intact, but its spirit was unbroken. In a determined raid on Prague, better machines and crews, heavier and more specialized bombs might be used than were available in Spain. Nevertheless, the idea that a city, or even a vital

part of it, might be laid in ruins by a single raid seems to be an exaggeration.

The main purpose of an air attack would be to break the *moral* of the population and to force the Government to surrender. That purpose is most unlikely to be achieved by a single assault. The Czechs, a tenacious race of great stamina, are more likely to be stung into furious resistance than despairing surrender.

Invasion by land would still be the decisive factor. On purely strategic grounds, the best German plan would be to rush the Moravian Gateway, that gap in the mountain ring which has been the traditional point of entry into the Bohemian basin for thousands of years. Coming from Prussian Silesia, they could then advance south-westward, traversing flat and open country, take Brünn (Brno), and throw a strong cordon of troops across the "waist" of Czechoslovakia, which at that point is only 100 miles wide. They would thus separate the whole of Bohemia and Moravia from Slovakia and Ruthenia. The last-named provinces could be sealed, to be dealt with later on, while the main German force would advance in the direction of Prague. At the same time other German armies, having forced an entry over the Bohemian passes, would take the Czechs in the rear.

On paper the plan looks beautiful, but in practice it has its difficulties. The 50-mile gap in the mountain frontier is not held by Germany alone; half of it borders on Poland. The German army would therefore have to base its operations on a bottle-neck of 25 miles width, the safety of its flank dependent on the goodwill of the Poles. Now the present Polish policy, in the hands of Colonel Beck, the Foreign Minister, is well disposed towards Germany; but Poland is also allied to France, and

the Polish people regard the Czechs and Slovaks as their kinsmen. Should France be drawn into the war on the side of Czechoslovakia, the present Polish régime may not be able to retain control of policy. Nor is it certain that it could prevent a spontaneous outburst of popular feeling in favour of Czechoslovakia. The Germans are well aware of this risk.

There remains the broad attack on the Bohemian passes. Although the hills rise to 5,000 feet, their general level is between 2,000 and 3,000 feet, and they are furrowed by numerous valleys of lower levels, carrying roads and railways. In the northernmost corner, between the rivers Elbe and Neisse, there is a stretch of some 40 miles where the slopes are not steep. Several minor breaks in the range occur also in the west and south-west. Altogether the frontier does not offer an insuperable obstacle to modern means of transport.

The most probable German scheme, therefore, would be to combine the three methods of attack : air-raids, the rushing of the Moravian Gateway, and the invasion across the Bohemian mountains.

What of Czechoslovak defence ? As far as can be gathered, the Bohemian frontier is, for the most part, only lightly fortified, and could not be held against a serious assault for any length of time—all the more as the German population in these areas would assume an unfriendly attitude towards the Czechoslovak forces. The Czechs are, it seems, quite prepared to withdraw fighting. The country is particularly suited to delaying actions. Retiring from hill to hill, from forest to forest, the Czechs would avoid a pitched battle, aiming chiefly at delaying the enemy. For many years the manoeuvres of the Czechoslovak army have turned on the problem of suc-

cessful retreat. It is said that the Czechs are ready, if necessary, to evacuate the whole of Bohemia, including the capital.

The retreat would come to a halt on prepared positions in a square or quadrangle formed by two parallel hill ranges which traverse the country from the south-west to the north-east. The western line is formed by the "Bohemian-Moravian heights" which join the Gesenke in the north. The eastern side is formed by the Little Carpathians and the White Carpathians, which join the main Carpathian range in the north-east. In the south-west the square borders on Austria, and in the north-east on the Moravian Gateway.

The Moravian Gateway has been transformed into one of the strongest fortresses in Europe. Some military experts, not usually given to exaggeration, hold that its line of fortifications is stronger than the French Maginot line. I do not add the word "unassailable," because that word was widely used to describe the Belgian fortresses which fell within a few weeks in 1914.

It is in this central square, then, that the Czechoslovak forces would stand for battle. By that time they would have lost their capital; the Government would have moved to Slovakia according to prepared plans. They would have lost the main centres of their heavy and engineering industry, as well as the bulk of their mineral resources, all of which are centred in Bohemia. But they would still have the coal of Moravia, the iron and other minerals of Slovakia, and a considerable part of the engineering industries. In Brünn is centred the manufacture of small and medium arms. Most of the heavy material is made by the Skoda works at Pilsen in Bohemia; but though these must be presumed to be lost, many new

factories have recently been established in Central Slovakia, and others have been transferred there from Bohemia. As for food supplies, the main agricultural regions of Czechoslovakia would still be available. Oil would still be supplied by rail or river from Rumania.

The position of the Czechoslovak forces after the evacuation of Bohemia would therefore not be as desperate as might be imagined. And even if the Moravian Gateway should be invaded, and the more westerly side of the square be outflanked, the main Czech force would still be intact east of the river Morava, and in the Slovak mountains.

This estimate assumes that Austria and Hungary would remain neutral. Hungary, in particular, would be restrained by the certainty that Yugoslavia and Rumania, though they might conceivably remain inactive in the event of a straight German-Czechoslovak war, would undoubtedly intervene as soon as Hungary stirred. The worst that might be expected from Hungary is a sort of malevolent neutrality, involving sabotage along the frontier.

Austrian Nazis might join the German forces in considerable numbers ; but as things are at present, it is unlikely that Austria should either openly or secretly permit German armies to cross her territory. These assumptions would be upset if a complete political change should take place in Austria. In that case the initial Czechoslovak position would be gravely weakened, although by no means hopeless. A German march through Austria would also bring foreign intervention against Germany considerably nearer ; the more so if Germany forced her way through Austria against the will of the Austrian Government.

A vital factor is the time it would take Germany, first, to bring the Czechoslovak Army to battle, and secondly, to enforce surrender. If Czechoslovakia is reduced within a week, her allies might grudgingly accept the accomplished fact. If she holds out for a month, it will be almost impossible to avoid a general European war.

The Czechs are well aware of that fact. They are confident, and military opinion both in France and Britain shares their view, *that they can resist a German assault without serious loss for between three and four weeks, and that they can go on fighting for at least another three months.*

Any estimate of the quality of the Czechoslovak forces can only be speculative. Fourteen divisions are permanently under arms; up to 28 divisions can be put in the field in wartime, provided mobilization is not hampered by sabotage, bombing of roads and railways, or rapid German occupation. The prevailing opinion is that the material equipment of the army is second to none in Europe, both in guns of all kinds and in motor transport. The air force is large and efficient. The fighting quality of the troops is an unknown factor, even if the behaviour of the non-Czechoslovak soldiers is left out of account. The Germans, who remember the mass desertion of Czech and Slovak troops during the world war, are apt to think poorly of their valour. But it must be emphasized that they fought exceedingly well on the Italian front, and only deserted when set against Slav opponents whom they regarded as their blood-brothers.

Moreover, the Czechoslovak campaign in Siberia is still remembered with admiration. So far, the Czechoslovak soldier has never had to fight for his own country. It is quite possible that he will show excellent qualities, especially as his equipment is first-rate.

The average Czech has much technical skill, courage, and stamina.

One more advantage on the Czechoslovak side would be that its whole purpose is defence. In modern warfare the defence is nearly always stronger than the attack. It has yet to be shown whether the latest perfections of air warfare, possibly in conjunction with gas, can break down this superiority of defence, which dates from the invention of the machine-gun. The experiences of the Spanish Civil War do not support such an assumption. Equipped with sound weapons, based on prepared positions, and disposing of a well-trained army of stolid fighting men, Czechoslovakia may yet confound calculations based on mere comparative numbers.

Is Peace Indivisible ?

Whether Czechoslovakia held out for three weeks or six months, the result of a straight fight between her and Germany could not be in doubt. From a wider point of view the issue hangs, therefore, on the willingness of other powers to restrain Germany or to enter the war on the Czechoslovak side. The Czech leaders are firmly convinced that Europe will not let their country go down unaided. They base that conviction not merely on a faith in existing treaties, but on certain military calculations.

The structure of Europe is held in place by a delicate strategic balance which is closely watched by the General Staffs of all countries. Any alteration of that balance in any part of Europe has its repercussions on the security of a number of countries which, at first glance, might not appear to be immediately interested. The defence of

a country does not consist only in repulsing an actual attack on its territory ; it demands also the prevention of any shifting of the balance which might at a later stage facilitate such an attack, or make its repulsion more difficult.

Applied to the Czechoslovak situation, this means that France and Russia—and in a lesser degree Great Britain, Italy, and Poland—would have a direct interest in preventing Germany from gaining control of an area whose possession would greatly facilitate a German attack on any of those countries.

Assuming that Germany resolved to invade Czechoslovakia, she would need almost the whole of her regular forces to ensure victory. Everything depends on a quick decision. Of the German standing army of 40 divisions no less than 30 divisions are needed, therefore, to beat the 14 Czechoslovak peace-time divisions fighting on prepared positions, especially as the Czechs would probably succeed in mobilizing at least another six divisions. Germany would need another ten divisions to man the Polish frontier. The whole of her regular army would thus be tied up in the East.

As Germany cannot be certain that France would remain neutral, she would have to take strong precautions on the French frontier. This she could not do without mobilization on a considerable scale. It is unthinkable that such a move, however secret, should not at once lead to mobilization in France. The French and German Staffs would then be faced with the knowledge that great advantages would fall to the side which struck first. The temptation might well be irresistible.

Italy would be uneasy and worried if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, because a German victory would before

long compel Austria to succumb to German control, whereupon Italy would be permanently exposed to German invasion. But Italy has now concentrated her ambitions on the Mediterranean. In a choice of evils, she would accept the German menace as a fair price for German diplomatic support in her Mediterranean schemes. She would accordingly remain neutral, trying to exact from Germany the highest possible reward for that attitude.

What would Great Britain do? In Central Europe the British rearmament scheme has been enthusiastically hailed as the salvation of peace. That view is based on the rash assumption that British arms would be used to restrain Germany from expanding in Central and Eastern Europe. It is by no means certain that they would be so used. If Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, there would be strong public feeling, extending to all parties, against British participation in the war. The argument that a German conquest of Czechoslovakia might ultimately threaten the British Empire in the Near East is far above the head of that elusive person, the average Englishman, who in the moments of crisis is apt to rise from his fireside and assume control of national policy.

But if in spite of British entreaties France should stand by her obligations to Czechoslovakia; and if, in due course, France were threatened with defeat by Germany, England would have to think again. The world war has brought home to a large section of the British people the vital importance of preventing Germany from gaining control of the Low Countries and the Channel ports. This principle has guided British policy for centuries. Whatever the cause through which France were involved

in war with Germany, it seems unlikely that Great Britain would stand by to see France defeated. The moment of decision may come within a week, a month, or a year of the outbreak of war. But it will come.

A German attack on Czechoslovakia is likely, even probable, but not certain, to lead to a general European war. Assuming, however, that Europe would allow Czechoslovakia to go down single-handed, the result would be somewhat as follows : Germany would probably incorporate North-West Bohemia ; Austria would get Southern Bohemia on condition that she submitted to German guidance ; Hungary would recover Slovakia and Ruthenia ; Poland would obtain the small but valuable mining district in Moravia as a reward for her neutrality during the war. There would then remain only a central island of about 7,000,000 Czechs, for whom some new solution would have to be found. With one stroke Germany would have made herself master, not only of Czechoslovakia, but of Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. The remaining countries would be too weak, and strategically too exposed, to offer resistance. France and Russia, having failed to protect Czechoslovakia, would never again be accepted by any of these small countries as guarantors against German designs. Germany would be stronger than she has been since the decline of the Holy Roman Empire.

XII

OUTLOOK

THE last chapter may have given the impression that war in Central Europe is all but inevitable. That is not the case. Speculating upon the future, one is apt to be attracted by the evil fascination of military calculations. But while military comparisons form the secret background of diplomacy, it is by no means certain that they will be put to the test.

Between Germany and Czechoslovakia war is not the only possible solution. It is not even the most likely solution. From time to time impatient Nazi chiefs in Berlin suggest that the Gordian knot be cut with the sword. But on second thoughts it is usually realized that the risk is too great.

Meanwhile great efforts have been made on the Czechoslovak side not only to avoid all provocation, but to prepare the way for a peaceful settlement of the quarrel. An attempt is now proceeding to improve the situation of the German minority; and though the agreement with the three German "Activist" parties provides only a framework which needs filling in, it is designed to remove much of the prevailing friction. It must be acknowledged that the Czechoslovak Press has practised considerable restraint in the face of German provocation. The speeches of the Czechoslovak leaders are nowadays invariably calm and moderate.

On the other hand, nothing that Czechoslovakia can do will remove the tension until Germany begins to practise similar restraint. The German resentment against Czechoslovakia and the natural sympathy with the Sudete Germans are expressed in a way which not only exaggerates but weakens the German case. In the matter of the German minority in Poland, which numbers one million, and lives in conditions far inferior to those of the Czechoslovak Germans, the Berlin Government has been able to restrain expression of public feeling almost to silence. The desire to bring pressure to bear on Czechoslovakia is natural enough, but the German leaders should reflect whether that game is worth the candle.

A constructive settlement in Central Europe might be achieved, for example, on the lines of Dr. Hodza's plan of economic collaboration among all the Danubian States. There is no question of excluding either German or Italian influence in the economic sphere; on the contrary, both countries would greatly benefit from a commercial improvement in the Danubian area. Whether a settlement is based on Dr. Hodza's plan or on any other does not matter; what matters is that the Danubian countries are at last given a chance to trade with each other free of political pressure from outside. The tension in that area is kept alive by the constant attempts of outside powers to use their economic influence for political purposes.

Germany has offered to conclude a pact of non-aggression with Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately the offer has been made in a way that leaves little scope for development. The German Government has never mentioned the terms suggested for this pact. It has, however, vaguely hinted that the Czechoslovak pact with Soviet

Russia should first be dissolved. There is considerable support in Czechoslovakia for an agreement with Germany, especially among the Agrarian Party and, of course, among the German minority. But the responsible Czechoslovak leaders have always declined to make separate terms with Germany. They will gladly come to an understanding with the Reich provided it is a general European understanding, including the Little Entente, France, and Soviet Russia. The reason for this attitude is clear : if Czechoslovakia renounced her claim to the assistance of her allies for the sake of a pact with Germany, she could no longer count on their protection if at a later stage it pleased Germany to terminate or disregard the pact.

Some negotiations are said to have been conducted between Prague and Berlin, but a compromise is not easy to reach. Fear and distrust do not help to bring the parties closer to each other. Czechoslovakia has had some bitter experiences during the past few years. She fears the Pan-German influence surrounding the Nazi régime ; she distrusts the German diplomacy of *divide et impera* ; she suspects that any Fascism system, whatever the temporary moods of its leaders, must ultimately find relief in an external war. Germany, on the other hand, feels hemmed in, and even threatened, by the association of Czechoslovakia with France and Soviet Russia. She will not easily resign herself to a settlement which leaves these alliances untouched. But the alliance with Russia at least is entirely due to the threatening German attitude during the past few years. In the last resort, it is in the hands of Germany to make or mar a peaceful solution of the Central European problem.

It must be stressed that a great deal will depend on the

issue of the Spanish Civil War, which at the time of writing is still undecided. If Germany and Italy triumph in Spain, their partnership will have been sealed : their hands will be free for further adventures : their self-confidence will be immensely increased. The German invention that countries with different political philosophies cannot live in peace with each other will have gained a semblance of truth. In all countries of Central and Eastern Europe those who wish to make the world safe for Fascism will be strengthened and encouraged. The forces working for peace will have lost faith in the ability of the Western powers to protect either their friends or their interests.

In this struggle between Fascism and Democracy, which is entirely "made in Germany," Czechoslovakia will play an important part. The Czechoslovak Republic is now the last European country east of France to retain a fully responsible parliamentary government and free democratic institutions. Any consolidation of the Fascist "front" will, therefore, expose Czechoslovakia to new dangers which might well undo all that has been done to bring about a peaceful settlement.

The part which Britain is called upon to play in the Central European friction has been outlined by Mr. Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, in a speech at Brussels in April, 1937 : "If the world is to pass from the period of avoiding war to one of creating peace, some more positive programme must be found. Those who have thought that this can easily be achieved by the mere expression of goodwill deceive themselves. The task is harder."

There is no need for commitments or treaties. There is no need for Britain to take sides. Her commitments

are the Straits of Dover, and once the peace breaks down she can only take one side. But while peace endures British understanding and British diplomacy can do much to lessen tension and remove friction. At the present juncture of European affairs, Britain holds the balance between peace and war. She is still trusted by both sides. If in the coming months and years her step is sure and her touch is firm, Europe may tide over the period of readjustment without disaster. There is some hope that British diplomacy may not falter again ; for its leaders are now convinced that the next war will offer very little opportunity for Britain to stand aloof. In the words of Mr. Eden, "We must neither mislead others nor be misled ourselves by any of those comfortable doctrines that we can live secure in a Western European glass-house."

XIII

SHOW-DOWN

The Germans in Vienna

ON the eleventh of March 1938 a German army corps crossed the Austrian frontier. While the mechanized columns, followed by hosts of German police and Nazi troopers, swiftly occupied the principal strategic centres throughout Austria, German aeroplanes landed some thousands of infantry on the airfields of the cities. Mass formations of the German air force, bombers and fighters, manœuvred all day to overawe any Austrians who might still have retained a mad thought of resistance. It was all over in a few hours. Austria was proclaimed a *Land* of the German Reich, Ministers and leading officials were arrested or "found shot," and the Austrian army, some ten divisions of indifferently - equipped troops, was contemptuously shipped off to Germany. Within a week all traces of Austrian independence had disappeared.

The show-down had come. Show-down, says the Oxford dictionary, means the act of laying down one's cards with their faces up, or an open disclosure of plans, means, etcetera. The etcetera is relevant. Germany's rulers have shown that they are ready to take big risks, and that they are no longer afraid of censure by other great

powers. They did not even trouble to find pretext or excuse: the joint protest of the British and French governments was rudely rejected as unjustified meddling in a purely "German affair."

How does Czechoslovakia stand now? Much of what was written in this book—which went to Press in August 1937—remains true, but the relation of forces has undoubtedly altered to the disadvantage of Czechoslovakia.

On purely strategic grounds, staff officers will tell you, Germany is in a fix. Her newly-extended frontiers, wedged in between Italy and Czechoslovakia, would be hard to defend if those two countries should both be among Germany's enemies. That has been quickly realized in Prague and Rome, and in the common desire to damp the German ardour some unexpected courtesies have since been exchanged between the two capitals. But while the possession of Austria is, in theory, a source of weakness to Germany, it is also, in practice, a strong reason for mopping up as soon as may be the rest of the Danube basin. The Germans cannot stay where they are. They must either make sure of Italy or reduce Czechoslovakia, or both.

Seen from Prague, the fall of Austria is a major disaster. The bulk of Czechoslovakia is now enclosed by German territory. It is true that the Army Command had long reckoned with a German attack through Austria in addition to other thrusts, and that the southern frontier is thoroughly fortified. But the Czech army will not now have a few days' warning. Strong German forces stand ready half an hour's ride from the southern frontier, the most vulnerable of all. From Linz, where from the beginning the main German force has been

concentrated, an attack could be delivered through a narrow break in the mountains in the direction of Budweis ; and farther east the hills give way to open country where nature affords no aid to defensive works. The Germans have greatly bettered their jumping-off position. They have also added to their army some hundred thousand Austrian troops which will soon be drilled up to German standard. Lack of man-power is Germany's chief military trouble ; ten extra divisions count for a great deal.

On the other hand, the Czechoslovak army is constantly being improved in training, equipment, and command of tactics. The fortifications along the whole exposed frontier are steadily becoming stronger. The air force is getting more and better machines ; its ground organization, which is particularly important in view of the proximity of the German air bases, is growing more efficient. The transfer of industries to sheltered regions, and the general preparations for an emergency, must have made much progress since these matters were surveyed on pages 98 to 104. If it comes to fighting, Czechoslovakia may still hold out against a German assault for a few weeks. And during that period Germany would experience, for the first time since the Napoleonic wars, destruction of her own territory. The Czech air force alone would leave severe marks, and if Russia should decide to send aircraft the damage might well be appalling.

All this is meant to suggest that there can be no comparison between a German march on Vienna and a march on Prague. Unless the German leaders are provoked to a point where caution is thrown to the winds—and that might well happen through any major incident in

the Sudeten districts, engineered, maybe, by the more daring Nazis bent on forcing Hitler's hand—they will probably try first to reduce Czechoslovakia by means other than war. And opportunities for pressure have much increased since the conquest of Austria.

Almost every line of communications that connects Czechoslovakia with foreign markets now runs through German territory. The Czechs used to bargain for cheaper freight tariffs by hinting that goods might be sent, instead of via Breslau-Stettin or Dresden-Hamburg, via Vienna-Trieste, and vice versa. Now all these routes, along which travel nine-tenths of Czechoslovakia's imports and four-fifths of her exports, could be closed at a single German order. There remains the Danube, carrying great barges down-stream to the Black Sea; but the opposite bank is Hungarian, and how long will it be so? As a last way out, Poland has offered facilities for Czech cargoes travelling overland to Gdynia, the new Polish harbour next door to Danzig. That route, still to be developed, can also be used only by the grace of Germany. And to counter these threats to the trade which keeps more than half the Czechoslovak population in employment, the Prague government can only point to the need of the eastern German industries for unhindered transport across Czechoslovak territory. Export from Silesia and Saxony, indeed, depends a good deal on that direct route to the Danube and the Mediterranean.

Henlein raises his Price

But Germany has an even better card to play: the Sudete Germans. Herr Henlein's *Sudetendeutsche Partei* has been immensely encouraged by the growth of Ger-

man power, and more directly by the statements of Hitler and Goering that the Reich claimed a right to the protection of German communities in other countries. Both the attraction of victory and the fear of being left on the wrong side of the fence have since caused most of the other German parties to seek collaboration with the S.d.P. Except for the Social Democrats, they have left the government and joined the opposition. Henlein can now put forward his demands on behalf of the great majority of the Czechoslovak Germans. And the demands have been changed out of all recognition since Austria fell. The pretence of loyalty to the Czechoslovak State has been dropped, and so far from making a secret of the close association with Berlin, Henlein has taken to stressing that his claims are backed by the might of the German Reich. He now advances, not his grievances, but his terms for peace, and his manner of stating those terms suggests the kind of ultimatum by which Austria was subdued.

The Prague government has at length made a comprehensive effort for conciliation. An amnesty for political prisoners was declared under which some thousands of sentenced Germans were set free. Municipal elections throughout the country have given the Germans an opportunity of making their newly-found unity felt in the local government of their districts. Dr. Benesh has proclaimed a new Statute of Nationalities—the term “minority” is now avoided in deference to German pride—which is to grant to the various communities of the State statutory rights in the place of administrative facilities. A “full and final” settlement is to be negotiated with Henlein.

Henlein's response has been to raise his price far

beyond anything which the Czech government could concede without renouncing Czechoslovak rule over the country as a whole, and indeed without renouncing independence and sovereignty.

At a party congress held at Carlsbad in April 1938 he rejected the offer of a statute as a perpetuation of injustice. The Czechs, he demanded, must first get rid of the idea that it was their particular task to form a bulwark against the "so-called German drive to the East"; to that end the foreign policy of the country, which had led Czechoslovakia into the ranks of Germany's enemies, must be revised. Only when the alliances with France and Soviet Russia had been severed would Henlein talk of peace, and peace must be based on the following eight-point programme :

Full equality of status for Czechs and Germans, guaranteed by the recognition of the German community as a "personality in law"; demarcation of the German areas and full Home Rule within the borders thus laid down; every German living outside these areas to enjoy the same statutory rights; removal of injustices inflicted since 1918 and reparation for damages suffered by Germans; German officials only in German districts; and full liberty to profess German nationality and German political philosophy.

That was little less than a declaration of war. Not one of these demands, properly understood, could be conceded by the Czechoslovak government without delivering the country into Hitler's hands. It would certainly be desirable for the Czechs to give to the Germans a considerably greater measure of Home Rule than they already enjoy; but the Home Rule claimed by Henlein includes the transfer of police powers, the

abandonment of military control of the frontier regions, and the establishment, within a democratic state, of a National Socialist dictatorship taking its orders from Berlin.

It would probably be possible, though painful, for the Czechs to transform the Republic into some form of federation of the three chief nationalities, though out of some $3\frac{1}{2}$ million Germans less than $2\frac{1}{2}$ millions live in areas (not in one continuous but several separate territories) that could be clearly defined—at the cost of leaving some 300,000 Czechs and many thousands of Jews under German rule. But if Czechoslovakia is to remain an independent State, she could not turn over the control of her most vital frontier to the Germans, nor cut her safety-lines to France and Russia. If at the bidding of less than a quarter of the Republic's population these things were done Czechoslovakia would within a short time be reduced to vassalage, her natural resources, her great industries, and the fate of ten million Slav people given over to Germany.

In present circumstances Home Rule for the Sudete Germans means vassalage not only for Czechoslovakia but for half a dozen other peoples in Central and South-Eastern Europe. For if Czechoslovakia falls, nothing can stop the Germans from establishing full control over the remaining Danubian and Balkan countries. It should be clearly understood that the question of Sudeten Home Rule is not one of local politics or abstract justice, but one of a tremendous shift of power from the Western nations to Germany. Once in control of the heavy industries of Czechoslovakia, the grain of Hungary, the oil of Rumania, and the various important raw materials of the Balkans, Germany would, without great effort,

immensely increase her warlike resources. Within a few years, if not earlier, she would be in a position to challenge the Western powers and to disregard their established interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The British and French governments have advised the Czechs to grant concessions "up to the utmost limit compatible with the integrity of the State." Such concessions will indeed be granted. Legislation is being prepared while these lines are written. But it is more than doubtful whether any concessions compatible with the integrity of Czechoslovakia will pacify the Germans. It is precisely the integrity of Czechoslovakia to which they object. They insist on capitulation.

Although some Czech and Slovak politicians might be prepared to join Henlein in a Fascist, pro-German government coalition, which would cut free of France and Russia and accomplish the virtual union with Germany without war, the vast majority of the people are aware that such surrender would mean the end of their hard-won independence—the return, after twenty years of freedom, to German domination.

A Dog's Life or a Lion's Death

The Czechs, however, are very practical people with much common sense. If they were convinced that their friends and allies had forsaken them, they would probably prefer a dog's life to a lion's death. "You cannot expect us to fight your battle all alone for ever," President Benesh once said to me.

Whether the Czechs will fight or surrender will depend

largely on their estimate of the relation of forces in Europe. How does Europe stand after the fall of Austria ?

On the day of the German march into Austria Marshal Goering informed the Czech Minister in Berlin that the German troops had explicit orders to halt fifteen kilometres short of the Czechoslovak frontier. He gave an assurance, later renewed on behalf of Herr Hitler, that "it would be the earnest endeavour of the German Government to improve German-Czech relations." The next day the Minister was further assured by Baron von Neurath that Germany considered herself bound by the German-Czechoslovak Arbitration Agreement of October 1925. These promises were read out by Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons and by Lord Halifax in the House of Lords. Within a few weeks no one seemed to attach any further importance to them. The Germans were in a jubilant mood, encouraged by the easy victory of Vienna to tackle the next job without much delay.

Italy, which in 1934 had stopped a German attempt to conquer Austria, held aloof when the attempt was repeated in 1938. Signor Mussolini, on receipt of a personal letter from Herr Hitler assuring him that the Austro-German union would never be used to the disadvantage of Italy, dispatched to the German dictator a message of congratulations and received the reply : "I shall never forget what you have done for me to-day." That does not mean that the Italians were not alarmed, but that they had no option. Italy had large armies in Abyssinia and Spain, and had, with skilful German encouragement, thoroughly estranged Britain and France. She had no choice of friends.

Mussolini, shrewd in opportunism, at once took steps to escape from the German grip, or more precisely, to reopen his back-door. By restoring normal relations (no more) with Britain and France, he has regained some freedom of action. And to Italy, as to Britain, nothing is more essential than the ability to manœuvre, to bargain, to shift their weight in accordance with the changing balance of forces. The alignment of the powers, which early in 1938 was beginning to crystallize, has been loosened once more. And when, in May, Hitler went to Rome, he extracted little more from Mussolini than an assurance of neutrality while Germany dealt with Czechoslovakia. To be anything but neutral in that issue would be against Italy's interests; either to aid or to oppose Germany would throw her back into the one-way street which means frustration.

Another agreement was made in Rome. Italy is not to oppose Germany in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Rumania, while Germany is not to stand in the way of any arrangement which Italy might wish to make with Yugoslavia and Greece. By the same token Britain and France have been told pretty plainly to keep their hands off the Danubian area, and in even plainer language any intervention of Soviet Russia in favour of Czechoslovakia has been proclaimed a *casus belli* beforehand.

Hungary appears to be next on Germany's list. Though Admiral Horthy, the Regent, rashly said on the morrow of the Austrian collapse that "foreign Messiahs" were not wanted in Hungary, it is hard to see how that country can resist almost any demand made upon it by Germany. In their anxiety to escape German domination—against which they have fought in bitter rebellions within living memory—many Hungarians

would no doubt be ready to join any coalition of powers that offered security. But there is no such coalition left in Central Europe. And in feudal Hungary great hosts of landless peasants are listening spellbound to the Nazi propagandists who promise them a share in the large estates.

In Rumania resistance to German influence has stiffened. King Carol had given the Fascist parties a chance of governing, only to oust them as soon as they began to lose popular support. In April he struck against the Iron Guard, while his government made friendly gestures towards Soviet Russia and announced extended facilities for British and American capital in the development of Rumania's natural resources. But the king's power hangs on a thin thread.

Yugoslavia has been too long playing off Germany against Italy, and both against France, to have much freedom left. Although she continues to collaborate quite honestly in the councils of the Little Entente, the joint influence of Germany and Italy is by now strong enough to make active Yugoslav aid for Czechoslovakia exceedingly doubtful. The Little Entente, indeed, is still a power to be reckoned with. The great arms factories of Czechoslovakia are pouring war material into Rumania and Yugoslavia. Diplomatic and economic relations are closer than ever. Loyalty to the common cause has not waned—but fear of Germany has grown. Those who are ready to oppose Germany in peace may not dare oppose her in war.

Poland remains hostile. Perched on the watershed between Germany and Russia, the Poles believe that for the moment it is safest to side with Germany. What they really want is leadership of a belt of neutral states

stretching from north to south between the two giants, holding them apart. Early in 1938 they challenged Russian interests by browbeating Lithuania into submission, and got away with it. Now they are helping Germany to push Russia out of Continental affairs altogether, taking care not to be involved in the actual collision. Polish troops have been concentrated on the Czechoslovak border, but they are unlikely to go into action. When all is over, Poland hopes to get a share of the spoils—Teshen and parts of the Carpathians—as a reward for helpful neutrality. Though the Czechs have renewed their efforts to improve relations with Poland, little success is likely beyond a commercial arrangement for the shipment of goods by rail and river to Gdynia.

If Germany has her way, neither Poland nor Hungary may get the territories they desire. The Germans have now realized that it would suit them better to leave Czechoslovakia, minus the Sudeten areas, more or less intact under German control than to allow Poland, Hungary, and Rumania to join lands across the highway to the oilfields and the Ukraine.

The World Without

The issue rests with the great powers. Having gone from retreat to retreat, will they make a stand when Czechoslovakia is assaulted?

Successive French governments have solemnly asserted that France will stand by her alliance with Czechoslovakia—which means that she will declare war on Germany if German troops invade Czechoslovakia. If the Germans could be made to believe that, they might

yet stop short of invasion. But the Germans see France deeply divided and Frenchmen still waiting for an emergency worth the sacrifice of party ambitions and class interests. A rich, powerful, patriotic nation, ready to close its ranks at a moment's notice to fight off an invader, France has looked on placidly while one by one the positions of her Continental power have slipped from her grasp: Poland, the Balkans, Spain, Austria. Reassured at last by a defensive alliance with Britain, France seems to have lost all desire for power. Are appearances deceptive? At the moment the question mark is the last word.

British policy, now run by insular Tories little versed in European diplomacy, seems equally resigned to a German hegemony in Europe. On the day when German troops invaded Austria, Herr von Ribbentrop, newly appointed German Foreign Minister, was entertained by Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, Premier and Foreign Secretary of England. The visitor was emphatic about Germany's peaceful intentions. Had not the Fuehrer expressly stated that he wanted peace? Germany had no intention of sending troops into Austria. They believed him; it was what they wanted to believe. When at last the truth could no longer be doubted, Lord Halifax "spoke sharply" to Herr von Ribbentrop, whose answer is not recorded. The British government was content to "disapprove emphatically," not of the rape of Austria but of the "masterful manner" (*The Times*) in which it had been carried out.

The rulers of Britain seem to have learned a little from that experience. Mr. Chamberlain admitted that a German attack on Czechoslovakia might provoke a war in which France, and ultimately England, would be

involved. Yet their hope is that Germany will manage to reduce Czechoslovakia by "peaceful means." How the Germans may interpret that term can be guessed from the fact that they are firmly convinced to have reduced Austria by "peaceful means."

In 1911 Lloyd George stopped German expansion in Africa by an open threat of war. England then had the command of the sea, which in those days counted for much. To-day the command of the air counts for more, and England has not got it. On that ground alone there is much to be said for the view that the uncertainties of war should be faced only when the German assault on direct British interests materializes, and not earlier, in defence of outposts.

What is indefensible is the effort, now prevalent in England, to excuse such postponement by the pretence that Czechoslovakia is in any case not worth fighting for. It cannot be denied that by the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1919 far more injustice was repaired than created. In the whirlpool of races in Central Europe no economic and strategic unit can ever be formed without including some national minorities. In pre-war Austria the Germans, the dominant race, were less than one-third of the total population; in pre-war Hungary the Hungarians were considerably less than one half. In Czechoslovakia, by contrast, the dominant Slav race (some eight million Czechs and two million Slovaks) forms more than two-thirds of the population, while the Germans are less than a quarter and the Hungarians less than one-twelfth. No doubt these proportions could still be improved upon, but the remaining territories would not be economic and strategic units capable of growing into organic states.

Czechoslovakia has not only proved an adequate economic unit but has developed parliamentary institutions and set up, by Central European standards, an example of tolerance towards minorities. To say that the country repeats on a small scale the faults of the old Habsburg Empire is a vast exaggeration. It was by no means the mixture of races that brought down that empire, but the rigid absolutism of the monarchy and the oppressive treatment of the subject races. The Czechs have much to learn, but to compare their rule with that of the Austrians or Magyars before the war is to do them an injustice. And does any one expect greater fairness all round when ten million Czechs and Slovaks have once more passed under alien rule?

If Czechoslovakia is to be left to make her own terms with Germany, let us at least admit that she was abandoned because Germany had become too strong to be opposed except at the risk of a European war, of which we would know the beginning but not the end.

But in international affairs nothing is inevitable, not even war. There are half a dozen ways in which Germany might achieve her aim; there are half a dozen other ways in which she may yet be foiled. One of the uncertainties lies in the future of France; another in the natural duration of dictatorships; yet another, perhaps the greatest, in the future of Soviet Russia. Stalin's regime has been both weakened and strengthened by the internal crisis of the past two years. Although M. Litvinov cautiously points out that the Soviet government is bound to aid Czechoslovakia against aggression only if France does so first, it is quite possible that the French may be guided in their decision by the readiness of Russia to face the German advance

before it reached the Soviet frontier. And whatever obstacles may be placed in the way of a Red army on its march through Rumania or Poland, a Red air force could reach Czechoslovakia on the day after the German attack.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Central European upheaval has been the display of stolid fortitude by the Czechs and Slovaks, masses and leaders alike. They have no nerves. Knowing that a false step may mean death and destruction, they are going their way with quiet assurance, showing no anxiety and giving no provocation. At least they deserve admiration for the courage with which they confront their fate.

